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“WHERE TWO SEAS MEET”:  
THE QURANIC STORY OF KHIDR AND MOSES  
IN SUFI COMMENTARIES  
AS A MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

by

Hugh Talat Halman

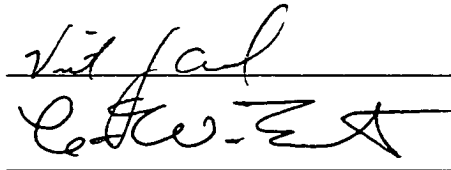
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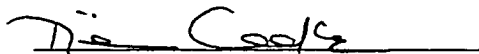
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A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
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in the Department of Religion  
in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

(Religion)

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2000

## ABSTRACT

The story of Moses' journey with Khidr (Qur'an 18.60-82) is often assumed to be a model for the master-disciple relationship in Sufism. How have Sufi thinkers applied this story to illuminating the relationship between spiritual guide (*murshid*) and disciple (*murid*)? To investigate this question, we have presented original translations and intertextual analyses of the work of three prominent Sufi exegetes: Abu 'l-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1072), Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1309), and 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (d. 1329).

After tracing the treatment of the Quranic story in the hadith collections of Bukhari and Muslim, the classical tafsir of al-Tabari, this work examines the three Sufi tafsirs. The themes in these tafsirs are related to the distinction between the instructing master (*shaykh al-ta'lim*) and mentor (*shaykh al-suhba*).

The commentator's approaches to master-disciple relationships are related but varied. Al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan both emphasize right conduct (*adab*), moral training (*ta'dib*), and mentoring companionship (*suhba*). Patience and obedience are necessary to fulfill this mentoring relationship and resolve the "paradox of mediation:" Moses asked to be taught what had not been originally transmitted from a human teacher. Unlike instruction (*ta'lim*), this process of mentoring companionship (*suhba / ta'dib*) goes beyond discursive knowledge and involves both action (*tasarruf*) and silence. Moses' mistake is to have imposed stipulations of conventional knowledge on Khidr's inspired knowledge. Ruzbihan follows this approach but accents as attributes of

shaykhs and saints the Khidrian qualities of “unveiled discovery” (*kashf* [*alethia*]), “discernment” (*firasa* [*diakresis*]), “inspiration” (*ilham*), and “inner knowledge” (*ilm al-ladunni*). Ruzbihan specifies that Khidr models these attributes from his station of “essential union: (*'ayn al-jam* ') in which the mediated and the mediator are one.

While al-Qashani also alludes to the master-disciple relationship, he identifies the motifs as symbols of the progressive training of the soul. The disciple progresses from the stations of commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammara*) and blaming soul (*al-nafs al-lawwama*) to the establishment of the contented soul (*al-nafs al-mutma'inna*). Where al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan apply the story to mentoring relationships, al-Qashani extends its allegorization to the interior journey. All three exegetes engage in a “hermeneutic of recognition” in which the narrative’s symbols evoke at once the inner phenomena of Sufism and its institutional expressions.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All intellectual work is an enterprise shared among friends, colleagues, and mentors. This present work explores this side of the journey of learning and discovery. I owe a great debt of gratitude for many people who have contributed to this project and its fulfillment.

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My parents, Talat Halman and Barbara Maggid, opened my eyes to the world and to the world of mystical literature. Their lives, love, and guidance called me to seek the place "where two seas meet."

My friend and wife Laura Thiel shared my enthusiasm for Moses' journey with Khidr and aided the completion of this work through her love and support.

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Blessed is the one who finds such a ‘servant [from our servants]’ and who holds the story of Moses and Khidr in his heart, and makes it his Imam.

Shams-i Tabrizi, *Maqalat*, 2:161

The Prophet said, “He was named al-Khidr because he sat upon barren white land and when he did, it became green with vegetation.”

*Sahih Bukhari* IV. 23. 614

...[Moses’] difficulties became solved, and he [Khidr] gave to him [Moses] the key to every question (in a way) beyond telling.

Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi  
*Mathnawi* II.3529

When the Pir has accepted thee, take heed, surrender thyself (to him):  
Go like Moses under the authority of Khidr.

Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi  
*Mathnawi* I. 2969

North and South and West are crumbling,  
Thrones are falling, kingdoms trembling:  
Come flee away to purer East,  
There on patriarch’s air to feast;  
There with love and drink and song  
Khidr’s spring shall make thee young.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe, “Hijra, or Flight,”  
*West-oestlicher Divan (West-Eastern Divan)*  
Section I “Moghanni Namah; or, Book of the  
Singer”

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## INTRODUCTION

### INTERPRETING THE MASTER-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP: THE GREEN MAN AL-KHIDR, THE MENTOR OF MOSES

One night in 1194, the Andalusian Sufi Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240) was traveling by boat from Tunis when he witnessed an extraordinary event:

I was in a boat in the port of Tunis. I had a pain in my stomach, but the people were sleeping so I went to the side of the boat and I looked out over the sea. Suddenly I saw by the light of the moon, which was full that night, someone coming toward me on the surface of the water. Finally he came up to me and stood with me. First he stood on one leg and raised the other so I could see that his leg was not wet. Then he did the same with the other leg. After talking to me for a while in his own language, he saluted me and went off, making for a lighthouse on top of a hill over two miles distant from us. This distance he covered in two or three steps. I could hear him praising God on the lighthouse. He had often visited our Shaykh al-Kinani, an elder of the order who lived at Marsa ‘Idun, from whose house I had come that evening. When I returned to the town a man met me who had asked me how my night with Khidr on the boat had been, what he had said to me and what I had said to him.

How do we approach this narrative? What did this meeting with Khidr mean to Ibn ‘Arabi? And what was this special language (“his own language”) which Khidr used to communicate?

This work focuses on the Islamic figure al-Khidr, the “Green One,” or, the “Green Man.”<sup>2</sup> Khidr’s story, which appears in the eighteenth chapter of the Qur’an

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<sup>1</sup> Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, *Al-Futuh al-Makkiyya* I: 186; 3: 182, quoted in Ralph W. J. Austin, *The Sufis of Andalusia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 27; Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabi* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 298-299.

<sup>2</sup> The name (*laqab*) or title of “Khidr” which derives from the Arabic root for the word green, *akhdar* is rendered formally as al-Khadir and more colloquially as al-Khidr, Khidr, and Khizr. The distinctions pertain mostly to vowelings and pronunciation. Each of these forms translates as the “green,” or the “green one.” Although the name Khidr does not appear in the text of the Qur’an, the identification is exegetically supplied in the hadith where it is traced back to the Prophet Muhammad.

(18.60-82), presents him as a teacher, guide, and mentor of Moses. In the next chapter we will present and analyze the Quranic story of Khidr and Moses in detail. Then in subsequent chapters, we follow an exegetical stream of Islamic sources which interpret and apply this Quranic narrative. We will show how this Islamic exegetical tradition has applied the story of Moses' journey with Khidr to an understanding of the practice of mentoring or spiritual guidance in Islam's mystical tradition of Sufism (*tasawwuf*).

### *The Story of Moses' Journey with Khidr*

In the next chapter we will analyze the Quranic story and explore its exegetical contexts in the Islamic tradition. For now, to help situate this introductory discussion, we will present the core of the story as it appears in the Qur'an. In this story Moses seeks Khidr at the mysterious and elusive place "where two seas meet," and petitions Khidr to teach (*tu'allimani*) him the guidance (*rushd*) he has received from God. Moses accompanies Khidr on a journey which tests the limits of Moses's patience and moral sensibility. Surprisingly, it is the prophet Moses who submits to Khidr for guidance, training, and learning. But Moses is not able to keep company with Khidr. Having lost patience (*sabr*) with Khidr's actions, Moses did not and could not understand and interpret Khidr's actions in their true light. And, as Khidr stipulates, it was patience

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See Muhammad ibn Isma'il b. al-Mughirah al-Bukhari (194-256), *Sahih Bukhari* Volume I, Book 3, Chapter 17, no. 74; and IV, 55, 23, no. 612, 614. ed. Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Medina: Islamic University, 1976.

which would have been required for Moses to continue in a fruitful relationship of companionship, spiritual guidance, or mentoring (*suhba*). Ironically, this story which yields diverse exegetical applications, is at once brief, elliptical, and opaque:

60. And when Moses said to his young servant, "I will not cease until I reach the meeting of the two seas or I will continue for ages."

61. And when they reached the meeting between them, they forgot their fish and it took its way into the sea [through] an opening.

62. And when they had passed on, he [Moses] said to his servant, "Give us our meal; we have encountered on our journey fatigue."

63. He [the young servant] said, "Did you see when we came to the rock? Indeed I forgot the fish and it was only Satan that caused me to forget to mention that it took its way into the sea wonderously"

64. He [Moses] said, "This is what we were seeking." So they retraced their footsteps.

65. And he found a servant from among Our servants. We gave him mercy (*rahma*) from Us. And We taught him knowledge from Our Presence (*'allannah min ladurra ilma*).

66. Moses said to him, "May I follow you so that you may teach me (*tu'allimni*) the guidance (*rushd*). you have learned?"

67. He [Khidr] said, "Indeed, you will not be able to have patience (*sabr*) with me.

68. How can you be patient concerning what your understanding (*khubr*) does not encompass?"

69. He [Moses] said, "You will find me, God willing (*in sha' Allah*) patient and I will not disobey you in anything."

70. He [Khidr] said, "If you would follow me, then do not ask me about anything until I mention (*dhikr*) it to you."

71. So they proceeded until when they rode in the boat, he broke it. He [Moses] said, "Did you intend to drown its people? You have done a strange thing"

72. He [Khidr] answered, "Did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me?"

73. He [Moses] said, "Don't blame me that I forgot and don't grieve me with difficulty."

74. And they journeyed until they encountered a youth and he [Khidr] killed him. He [Moses] said, "Did you kill a pure soul [who had not slain] another soul? Truly you have done a reprehensible thing"

75. He [Khidr] said, "Did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me?"

76. He [Moses] said, "If I ask you about anything after this, then don't keep companionship with me (*tusahibini*). You have received an excuse from me."

77. So they proceeded until when they came to the people of the village. They sought food from its people, but they refused them hospitality. And they found in it [the village] a wall verging toward (*yuridu*) destruction and he [Khidr] raised it up. He [Moses] said, "If you had wished you could have taken a reward for it."

78. He [Khidr] said, "This is the parting between me and you. But I will tell you (*sa'unabi'uka*) the ultimate meaning (*ta'wil*) of what you did not have the patience to bear.

79. "As for the boat, it belonged to poor people who worked on the sea and I wanted (*aradtu*) to make it useless, for there followed them a king who took every boat by force.

80. "As for the youth, his parents were believers (*mu'minain*) and we feared that he would oppress them with rebellion and disbelief.

81. "So we desired (*aradna*) that their Lord would give them one better in purity and closer in mercy (*rahma*).

82. "And as for the wall, it belonged to two youths. They were orphans in the town and under it was a treasure belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man (*salih*). So your Lord desired that they reach their maturity and retrieve their treasure – a mercy (*rahma*) from your Lord. And I did not do it by my own command. That is the ultimate meaning (*ta'wil*) of what you could not bear with patience."

### *Khidr's Roles and Representations*

Who is Khidr, the mentor of Moses, and what related roles does he fill? In popular culture Khidr is commonly recognized as a legendary immortal, a patron saint of travelers, and a symbol of saintly proximity to God. In the tradition of Sufism, Khidr represents both the saint or "friend of God" (*wali Allah*) and the spiritual master (*shaykh, pir; murshid*). Khidr's roles opens the question of complementary modes of authority shared by two types: (1) the figure of the prophet (*nabi/ pl. anbiya* ), whose line in Muslim prophetology has ended with the seal of the prophets, Muhammad, the Messenger of God (Rasul Allah), and (2) the figure of the saint or "friend of God," (*wali Allah*) whose line of sainthood (*wilaya/walaya*) continues in the lineage of the



Sufis.<sup>3</sup> Explaining the use of Khidr in a hagiography of the illiterate, wild, and widely-respected Berber saint Abu Yi‘zza (d. 572/1177), Vincent Cornell comments:

[T]his legendary purveyor of perennial wisdom [Khidr], although denied the status of prophet by the majority of Muslim opinion, was nonetheless able, as a *wali Allah*, to surpass the prophet Moses in his understanding of the mysteries that lie beyond mundane perception.<sup>4</sup>

Ahmad al-‘Azafi’s hagiography is one instance among many in which the figure of Khidr symbolizes and legitimates the continuing presence of wisdom and grace, embodied in the saint (*wali Allah*) or spiritual master (*murshid*), even after the end of prophecy. And as al-‘Azafi’s hagiography shows, Khidr represents an aspect of the saint’s authority which in some ways not only complements but also augments the knowledge and authority invested in the prophet.

In addition to being a colorful figure spanning a variety of Islamic – and even some Western – literatures, Khidr’s story informs an understanding of the master-disciple relationship, mentoring or spiritual guidance within a Sufi context. A small number of scholars have alluded to the symbolic role of Khidr in the construction of the understanding of the role of the spiritual master and the process of spiritual

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<sup>3</sup> For a careful inquiry into the prospects and problems of terminologies of Islamic sainthood, see Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xvii-xxi and 272-285. For a short introduction to the terms of sainthood and a comparison with the type of the Prophet, see Frederick M. Denny, “‘God’s Friends:’ The Sanctity of Persons in Islam,” in Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond, eds. *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 69-97. The alternative titling of this essay as it appears in the table of contents is instructive: “Prophet and *Wali*: Sainthood in Islam.”

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, 79. This hagiography was written by the legist Ahmad al-‘Azafi (d. 633/1236), *Di ‘amat al-yaqin fi zi ‘amat ak-muttaqin* (The Pillar of Certainty in the Leadership of the God-conscious).

guidance. However no one has explored the contribution of the story of Moses' journey with Khidr to the development and explanation of that mentoring process of spiritual guidance. Yet, spiritual guidance is essential to the transmission of the mystical heritage and practice of Sufism.

How have those few scholars who identify Khidr as a model of mentoring explained his role? Irfan Omar<sup>5</sup> identifies Khidr as providing an alternative to a living master, but ignores three issues: (1) the nature of discipleship with Khidr; (2) the more prevalent trend of relationships with Khidr as a complement to relationships with living masters; and (3) the role of the story of Khidr and Moses in informing the practice of discipleship with a living master.

James Jervis<sup>6</sup> alludes to the story as a type of tale about an "apprentice hero's journey with his magical or mystical mentor." He leaves the question of the relationship unexplored and initiates instead a wide-ranging esoteric and theosophical literary exploration of the symbolism of Khidr and the color green. Jervis' designation of Khidr as an "angel," and his interpretation of the story as a "visionary recital" may provide interesting analogies, but they may also be misleading. Such interpretations seem at variance with the majority of texts on Khidr.

Shawkat Toorawa<sup>7</sup> calls the story at the outset "influential in elaborations of

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<sup>5</sup> Irfan Omar, "Khidr in the Islamic Tradition," *Muslim World* 83, no.3-4 (July-October 1993): 279-294.

<sup>6</sup> James Jervis, "Khizr: the Emerald Angel of the Heart," *Hikmat* vol. III, no. 6 (July 1992): 37-44.

<sup>7</sup> Shawkat Toorawa, "Khidr: the History of a Ubiquitous Master," *SUFI* Issue 30 (Summer

the notion of the master-disciple relationship in Sufism...”(p. 45) but leaves this vital topic unexplored. Toorawa’s article is otherwise an interesting -- if somewhat erratic -- survey of literary, hagiographical, and classical sources.

Ian Richard Netton<sup>8</sup> asserts that Ibn ‘Arabi’s interpretation of Moses and Khidr’s separation as a “mutual agreement,” rather than failure on Moses’s part, should be construed to mean that while Khidr is the “Supreme Master,” Khidr and Moses were not engaged in a master-disciple relationship: “There is no Master/Pupil relationship here in Ibn al-‘Arabi’s text in which al-Khadir is the Supreme Master.”<sup>9</sup> Netton’s view of “mutuality” is only one aspect of Ibn ‘Arabi’s treatment of the relationship and the separation. An alternative reading of Ibn ‘Arabi’s discussion suggests that Khidr defers to Moses’s status as Apostle, out of respect for Moses’s office, not as an endorsement of Moses’s decision to effect their separation.<sup>10</sup>

One scholar who has considered the relationship between the story of Khidr and Moses and the master-disciple relationship is Sara Sviri.<sup>11</sup> In a personal and poetic essay Sviri uses the Khidr story to describe the teacher relationship based on her own experience and as she applies it to the case of the contemporary Naqshbandi teacher

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1996), 45-49.

<sup>8</sup> Ian Richard Netton, “Theophany as Paradox: Ibn al-‘Arabi’s Account of al-Khadir in His *Fusus al-Hikam*,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 11 (1992): 11-22.

<sup>9</sup> Netton, *ibid.*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam (The Bezels of Wisdom)* trans. Ralph W. J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 259-260.

<sup>11</sup> Sara Sviri, “Where the Two Seas Meet: the Story of Khidr,” *SUFI* Issue 31 (Autumn 1996): 28-37.

Irina Tweedie.<sup>12</sup> In Khidr, Sviri finds the paradoxical qualities of the teacher as both “a merciful, nourishing benefactor” and a “ruthless, uncompromising demolisher of habits and thought forms.” (p. 36) She describes the teacher as both “undertaker and midwife” (p. 33); “a reviver of dead souls and the destroyer of illusions” (p. 35); “like a finely-tuned compass, [which] always points to the ‘mystical north’ ” (p. 35); “a black hole...a door to the beyond.” (p. 35) These descriptions, at once poetic and dramatic, are useful to the practitioner though they do not relate to more conventional Sufi discourse on the *murshid-murid* relationship. Sviri provides leads for what might be found in extra-Quranic literature, but does not explore its treatment of the topic.

*Sufism: Inner Knowledge and Teaching Authority*

This work focuses on examining the relationship between the story of Khidr and Moses and the mentoring relationship of spiritual guidance as that relationship appears in Sufi tafsirs and hagiographies. The figure of Khidr plays a distinctive role in Sufi exegesis. He has served as both an example and counterexample -- sometimes justifying and sometimes challenging -- the role of the mentor in the spiritual training of disciples (*murids*). This work is situated in an Islamic mystical framework, the mystical dimension of Islam identified as Sufism (*tasawwuf*). Our work calls for attention to the Qur’an as scripture and the two principal genres of Quranic exegesis: *hadith*, (authenticated reports of the Prophet Muhammad’s words, acts, and decisions); and

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<sup>12</sup> Irina Tweedie, *Daughter of Fire* (Inverness, California: Golden Sufi Center Publishing, 1986).

*tafsir* (the corpus of scriptural commentary). As a work on Sufism, this study requires attention to Sufi Qur'an commentary and its contemporary historical context.

What then is Sufism? Some traditional answers are simple and brief: "Sufism is good moral characteristics. Whoever surpasses you in good moral characteristics surpasses you in purity."<sup>13</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup>-century scholar Ibn Khaldun described Sufism as a "special field" within the science of Islamic religious law:

It is concerned with pious exertion, self-scrutiny with regard to it, discussion of the different kinds of mystical and ecstatic experience occurring in the course of (self-scrutiny), the mode of ascent from one mystical experience to another, and the interpretation of the technical terminology of mysticism in use among them...Mystical exertion, retirement, and spiritual exercises are as a rule followed by the removal of the veil of sensual perception. The Sufi beholds divine worlds which a person subject to the senses cannot perceive at all.<sup>14</sup>

These definitions stress Sufism as moral character (*akhlaq*) and a curriculum of training leading to mystical experience. Other definitions stress Sufism as a path of love. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century al-Hujwiri wrote:

"Sufi" is a name which is given, and has formerly been given, to the perfect saints and spiritual adepts. One of the Shaykhs says: *Man saffahu 'l-hubb fa huwa safi*<sup>15</sup> wa man saffahu 'l-habib fa-huwa Sufiyy<sup>15</sup>, "He that is purified by love is pure, and he that is absorbed in the Beloved and has abandoned all else is a Sufi."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Risalah al-Qushayriyyah* Translated by Barbara von Schlegell as *Principles of Sufism* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1991), 304.

<sup>14</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman Abu Zayd ibn Muhammad b. Muhammad ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), *Kitab al-'Ibar*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal; edited and abridged by N.J. Dawood as *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Bollingen Series XLIII (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 360

<sup>15</sup> Abu'l al-Hasan 'Ali al-Hujwiri (1039-1073), *Kashf asl-Mahjub*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, *Kashf al-Mahjub: the Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism* (London: Luzac, 1911) and rpt. as *The Revelation of the Mystery*. (Accord, N.Y.: Pir Publications, 1999), 34.

Finally, some definitions of Sufism emphasize its aspect of inner knowledge. In this 10<sup>th</sup>-century example, the story of Khidr provides the basis of the definition:

The sciences of Sufism are esoteric knowledge, which is the knowledge of inspiration, and an unmediated secret between God (the mighty and majestic) and his friends [i.e., the saints]; it is knowledge from the presence. God the mighty And the majestic said [that Al-Khidr was one] “whom we taught knowledge from our presence” (Qur’an 18.65). That is the special knowledge which is the sign of the saints and the reality of wisdom...When asked about this esoteric knowledge, the Prophet said,] “It is knowledge between God and his friends of which neither proximate angel nor any one of his creatures is aware” Thus every outer has an inner, every inner has a secret; and every secret has a reality. This is what God the great and majestic gives to his friends, as a secret by a secret. It is one of the signs of sainthood. The saints subsist by that, and they live a wonderful life by it. They are the most powerful of God’s creatures after the prophets (God’s blessings upon them all), and their sciences are the most powerful of sciences. <sup>16</sup>

These examples reveal four main themes found among various definitions of Sufism: (1) moral character (*akhlaq; adab*); (2) spiritual training (*tarbiyya, riyada*); (3) love (*‘ishq, hubb*); and (4) inner knowledge (*‘ilm ladunni*).

This study especially centers on how Sufi Qur’an commentators have used the story of Moses and Khidr to explore two important dimensions of Sufi practice and training: *adab* or the proper conduct and etiquette between master and disciple;<sup>17</sup> and

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<sup>16</sup> *Adab al-Muluk* (10<sup>th</sup> century, unattributed ) selection translated by in Carl Ernst, in *ibid.*, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 62. Although the identification of Khidr’s name has to be inserted by the translator, the identification is clear because of the phrase, “whom We taught knowledge from our presence.” This phrase appears only once in the Qur’an and describes Khidr (18.65).

<sup>17</sup> *Adab* as a means of mystical training resulting in the development of *akhlaq* (morals) is discussed in the following works: Abu’l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Ar-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, trans. Barbara von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism* (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1990), 280-81; 308-315. Al-Hujwiri, *ibid.*, 333-366. Muhammad Ajmal. “*Adab* in the Murshid-Murid Relationship.” ed., Barbara Metcalf, *Moral Conduct and Authority*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 245ff. Gerhard Bowering, “*Adab* Literature of Classical Sufism: Ansari’s Code of Conduct.” ed. Barbara Metcalf, *Moral Conduct and Authority*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 66 ff. James W. Morris, “Situating Islamic ‘Mysticism’ ” ed. R.A. Herrera, *Mystics of the Book: Themes Topics, Typologies*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 298. F. Gabrielli, “*Adab*,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Vol. 1. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), 175-176. A related concept of great significance is the Quranicly-based

*suhba*, the mentoring or companionship which underlies the transmission of knowledge and spiritual experience in a Sufi register.<sup>18</sup> Both concepts are interrelated. *Adab*, which may be translated by terms such as “culture,” “rules of discipline,” “correct behavior,” and “comportment,” involves the training of the soul on a number of levels. Al-Qushayri explains the *adab* of the Sufis in this way:

Abu ‘I-Nasr al-Tusi al-Sarraj observed,... “The elect are concerned with cleansing the heart, guarding the secrets, being faithful to oaths, holding to the present moment, stopping attention to stray thoughts, and having correct behavior at times of requesting when in the divine presence and in the stations of nearness.”<sup>19</sup>

The concept of *adab* is associated closely with the Prophet Muhammad who is considered the model of *adab* and is recorded as having said, “My Lord disciplined me and taught me the most virtuous conduct.” (*Adabni Rabbi fa-ahsana ta’dibi*)<sup>20</sup>

Al-Hujwiri describes the importance of *suhba* for the training for novices and implies that its basis is *adab*:

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term *akhlaq* (ethics, morals, innate disposition). See R. Walzer, “Akhlak,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Vol 1. Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 325-329.

<sup>18</sup> *Suhba* as a form of spiritual development is discussed in the following: Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, “Suhba,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade. (New York: Macmillan, 1987). Al-Hujwiri, *ibid.*, 333-366. J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, 312.

<sup>20</sup> Javad Nurbaksh, ed. *Traditions of the Prophet* vol. 2. (New York: Khaniqah Nimattulahi Publications, 1983), 47. Hujwiri, *ibid.*, p. 334.

Since you have perceived that the most important thing for the novice is companionship, the fulfillment of its obligations is necessarily incumbent upon him. Solitude is fatal to the novice, for the Apostle [Muhammad] said, "Satan is with the solitary, but he is further away from two who are together".... The principle of the Sufis in companionship is that they should treat everyone according to his degree. Thus they treat old men with respect, like fathers; those of their own sort with agreeable familiarity, like brothers; and young men with affection, like sons.<sup>21</sup>

This study of the story of Khidr and Moses in Sufi commentaries explores a network of related themes: categories of knowledge, types of teachers and mentors, and spiritual psychology and its pedagogy in the sense which late antique Christians gave to the term *paideia*.<sup>22</sup> Together these themes contribute to an investigation of the means for the transmission of intimate or inner knowledge. This intimate or inner knowledge is introduced in the Quranic text through the phrase, "We taught him knowledge from Our presence (*'allamnahū min ladunna 'ilma*)."<sup>23</sup> From this phrase exegetes have codified the term *'ilm ladunni*, which translates as "knowledge from [God's] presence," or "divinely-bestowed knowledge." The term *'ilm ladunni* describes an inspired God-given knowledge transmitted outside textual and institutional channels. This inner knowledge is paired with divinely-bestowed mercy mentioned in the same verse: "And We bestowed upon him mercy from Ourselves" (*a'taynahū rahmatan min 'indina*).<sup>24</sup> Together this knowledge and mercy lie beyond

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<sup>21</sup> Al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, 338-9.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations* 1:2 (Spring 1983): 1-23. Brown explains that the *paideia* of the Christian saints focused on establishing virtue in a person through face to face contact.

<sup>23</sup> Qur'an Sura al-Kahf (18.65)

<sup>24</sup> The term *rahma* eludes translation. It is often translated as mercy, compassion, or grace. However *rahma* is used in a broad sense that includes all these and more, especially the activity of revelation. The root *r-h-m* yields words which include two of the most repeated Names of God,



discursive structures and are unmediated. The Quranic concept of *'ilm ladunni* both evokes and legitimates a Sufi epistemology and esoteric exegesis which 'recognizes' in the signs of the Qur'an reflections of a trained and disciplined mystical consciousness.

These themes all invite questions about the relationship between two poles of authority in Sufism: the book and the master.<sup>25</sup> The example of Khidr leads to the question of whether or how spiritual guides may or may not serve as exemplars of the prophetic *sunna*, the norms and standards of behavior, faith, and practice established by the Prophet Muhammad. Ultimately the example of Khidr leads to the paradox struck between the mediator's direct acquisition of (unmediated) knowledge and grace from God, on the one hand, and his role which finds him being asked to mediate that knowledge and grace, on the other.

The sections of three Sufi commentaries which treat the story of Moses' journey with Khidr are presented in original translations and examined:

Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri (376/986 -465/1072), *Lata'if al-isharat*, ed. Ibrahim Basyuni (6 vols.; Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1968-71). Vol 2, pp. 406-412.

Ruzbihan b. Abi Nasr al-Fasa'i al-Daylami al-Baqli al-Shirazi, Sadr al-Din Abu Muhammad (522/1128-606/1209), *'Ara'is al-bayan fi haqa'iq al-*

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*Rahman* and *Rahim* and also the word for the womb, *rahim*. These more comprehensive, ubiquitous, and maternal resonances cannot be matched in English. The English words "caring" and "kind" offer the advantage of carrying some of the maternal resonances (especially since the word kind is related to "kin"). The English words "mercy," with its connotations of exchange ("commerce"), "compassion," with its connotations of suffering ("passion," *pathos*), and "grace," with its connotation of a quality from outside the natural order, to different degrees elude the semantic field of *rahma*.

<sup>25</sup>This relationship between poles of authority is described in Muhsin Mahdi, "The Book and Master as Poles of Cultural Change in Islam," in *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages: Fourth Giorgio Della Vida Biennial Conference*. Ed. Speros Vryonis Jr. (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975), 3-14.

*Qur'an / The Brides of Explanation on the Realities of the Qur'an.*  
Cawnpore (1285/1868-9) Calcutta 1300/1883; Karachi  
(1310/1892-3) (Arabic Lithographs) Lithograph supplied by Alan  
Godlas.

‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (d. 730/1329), *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*  
(attributed to Muhyi al-Din ibn ‘Arabi), ed. Mustafa  
Ghalib (2 vols.; Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 766-773.

In this chapter our purpose is to introduce briefly the figure of Khidr, to indicate his ubiquity and significance, and to outline the direction of this study. An additional purpose of this introduction is to outline some relevant theoretical issues. One might begin with the very question of how this story applies to teacher-student or master-disciple relationships. What legitimates the interpretation of Khidr as either a teacher or an analogue or model of teaching? Is this assessment of Khidr as an example of a teacher inherent in the Qur’anic narrative or is it a function of eisegesis? In the text of the Qur’an it is narrated that God has taught Khidr. Khidr is “one of Our servants to whom We had taught knowledge from Our presence (*‘allamanahu min ladunna ‘ilma*).” Does the fact that God taught this knowledge translate to the potential for it to be readily taught to another person? As we shall see, al-Qushayri and Ruzbihuan Baqli do not assume this. Moses approaches Khidr and asks to “follow” him (*hal attabi ‘uka* [May I follow you?...]) so that, as Moses says, “you might teach me” (*tu’allimani*); Khidr, in his response acknowledges that Moses may “follow” (*ittaba ‘tani*) him, but does not explicitly identify his activity as teaching. Interpreting their relationship as that of teaching seems plausible, but involves a number of

inferences.<sup>26</sup> While contextual clues may be taken to suggest that their relationship involves teaching, direct indication is more elusive: Moses proposes that Khidr “teach” him; Khidr, in turn affirms that Moses may “follow” him and before their parting, Khidr conveys to Moses the “true meaning” (*ta’wil*) of the acts he committed. Is Khidr’s agreement to allow Moses to “follow” him equally an intention to teach Moses and accept him as his student? Does Moses’ assertion that Khidr can teach him validate our inference that Khidr is a teacher? Are the contextual inferences sufficient to be counted as proof that Khidr’s role is that of teacher? And if Khidr is a teacher, what are his methods? How much of Khidr’s teaching role is fulfilled in the three acts on the journey as compared with his verbal explanations before he and Moses part?

Other theoretical issues emerge as well: How does the authority of Khidr’s inner knowledge complement or challenge textual, institutional, and juridical authority? How does this basis of authority relate to authority derived from the Prophetic precedent (*sunna*)? How shall we situate our analysis, and that of our commentators in relation to typological comparisons? Can we apply our discussion of Khidr to

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<sup>26</sup> Moses requests to follow Khidr in order that Khidr might “teach” him (*tu’allimani* [18.66]) and Khidr explains the terms Moses must fulfill if he would “follow” him (*ittaba’tani* [18.70]). It is Moses who assumes and asserts that Khidr’s knowledge is a guidance which he can be taught. (“May I follow you that you might teach me (*tu’allimani*) of what you have been taught (*’ullimta*) of guidance (*rushd*).” [18.66]) In introducing Khidr, the Qur’an says of him, “We taught him knowledge from Our presence (*’allamnahu min ladunna ’ilma*).” The text establishes that God taught Khidr but leaves unresolved the question of whether Khidr can in turn teach this knowledge to Moses. We note these points here as they will relate to the assessment by the Sufi Qur’an commentator al-Qushayri (translated below in chapter three and discussed in chapter four) that Khidr’s knowledge is unmediated and therefore cannot be taught. The fact that Khidr himself neither introduces, nor appropriates Moses’s use of “teaching” bears upon the question of whether Khidr’s knowledge is unteachable. These considerations also relate to different types of teaching. Al-Qushayri, for example, will distinguish two types of teaching: guidance (*tarbiyya*) and instruction (*ta’lim*).

considerations of the master-disciple relationship across traditions? In addition to introducing these considerations, we will present the development and direction of the subsequent chapters in studying how Sufi commentators have used the figure of Khidr as a model for mystical mentorship.

*Why is the Mentor of Moses a “Green Man?”*

Often when one mentions the “Green Man” outside of an Islamic context, one may think of the Green Man whose stone images grace household gardens, and the pagan figure of the Green Man.<sup>27</sup> Many medieval cathedrals featured faces framed with foliage; these were the faces of the Green Man. There are “green” saints: St. George and St. Michael. In the Arthurian cycle, Sir Gawain is initiated by a Green Knight.<sup>28</sup> People concerned about “men in black,” think about “little green men.” Star Wars fans may think of Luke’s teacher, the green-skinned Yoda. Some think of Mayday’s Jack-in-the-Green (the subject of a Jethro Tull song.) A magazine titled *The Green Man* features articles for pagan men. Who is the “Green Man?” In a recent popular book,

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<sup>27</sup> For a treatment of the Green Man from this perspective see William Anderson, *The Green Man: the Archetype of Our Oneness with the Earth*. (London and San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990) and Kathleen Basford, *The Green Man*. (Ipswich, 1978).

<sup>28</sup> Brian Stone, tr. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Penguin Books, 1959). The persona and actions of the Green Knight, as Stone describes them echo in some ways the stages of Khidr’s persona and acts: “Thus, on his first appearance he is described successively as a terrifying giant (ll. 137-40), a handsome and well-built knight (ll. 141-6), a weirdly green – and hence, implicitly supernatural person (ll. 147-50....And on his last appearance, besides all these, he appears as a warm and sympathetic human being (ll. 2333-6), an omniscient confessor who judges with accuracy and compassion, and above all with authority (ll. 2338-99, and finally as a human, subtly diminished by the termination of his supernatural function.” (idem, 116).

*The Green Man* William Anderson includes “Green Men” from a range of periods and cultures, including: Osiris (who usually was depicted as green), Attis, Adonis, Dionysis, and even Robin Hood!

Why would an Islamic figure bear the name the “Green Man?” First, green is the emblematic color of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad usually wore green or white; the dome of the mosque of the Prophet is green; paradise, the eternal garden, is implicitly a green realm. Verses in the Qur’an describe the inhabitants of paradise wearing green robes<sup>29</sup> and reclining on green couches.<sup>30</sup> The Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubayr, writing in the eleventh century, reported that the Ka’aba’s silk covering (*kiswa*) was green.<sup>31</sup> The significance of the nickname al-Khidr, “the Green,” takes its place in a rich symbolic matrix evoking at once prophethood, paradise, and piety.

### *Precedents and Parallels*

Some of the earliest scholarly -- and much popular -- work on Khidr has seized on his story’s potential typological parallels across traditions. As we shall see below, some scholars have related the story to the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Alexander Romance*, and even some stories of Elijah. Folklorists have classified the story of Khidr and

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<sup>29</sup> Qur’an Surat al-Kahf (18. 31); Sura Insan (76. 21.)

<sup>30</sup> Qur’an Sura ar-Rahman (55. 76 )

<sup>31</sup> Abu’l-Husayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr (540/1145-614/1217), “A Description of the Sacred Mosque and the Ancient House,” from *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans.: R.J.C. Broadhurst, excerpted in Ilse Lichtenstadter, ed., *Introduction to Classical Arabic Literature*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 376-392. See pp. 377, 384.

Moses as a theodicy tale (AT 759 / Stith Thompson C410).<sup>32</sup> As enriching as such frameworks can be, I want to study its value as a distinctively Islamic source within a series of related Islamic contexts. How have Muslims, and especially Muslim mystics, understood and applied this story?

After exploring its particular Islamic significances, we will be better able to return to the cross-traditional implications of the story with clarity. The story of Moses and Khidr explores a situation and issues which are essential to many types of religious traditions: spiritual guidance, or the master-disciple relationship. Masters are known across religious traditions by many names: Hindus have gurus and avatars; Buddhists, lamas and “virtuous friends” (*kalyanamitra*); Taoists, “perfected masters” (*chun tzu*); Hasidic Jews, “authentic masters,” *tzaddiks*; Sufi Muslims, “spiritual elders” (*shaykhs*), Eastern Orthodox Christians, “elders” (*starsy*). Similarly, how do we understand Socrates’ appreciation of his teacher Diotima, whom he claims in the *Symposium*<sup>33</sup> was his only teacher and from whom he learned only love? By analogy the story of Khidr and Moses may offer insights into the dynamics of these varied relationships of spiritual guidance. Our understanding of such diverse phenomena as the desert fathers, late antique *paidiea*, eastern religions, and new religious movements

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<sup>32</sup> Haim Schwartzbaum, “The Jewish and Moslem Versions of Some Theodicy Legends (Aa-Th. 759),” *Fabula* 3 (1959): 119-169.

<sup>33</sup> Plato, *Symposium* 205E-212C. Diotima’s discourse to Socrates on love (*eros*) shares the dialectic quality which Khidr displays in his teaching to Moses on the true interpretation (*ta’wil*) of his acts. Diotima explained to Socrates that love belongs in between the polarities of good and bad, beauty and ugliness, wisdom and ignorance. Khidr, the teacher Moses found “where two seas meet,” showed Moses that even those acts which Moses judged as ‘bad’ had beneath them the ‘good’ of a hidden treasure of mercy.

requires understanding the master-disciple relationship. And it is that mentoring relationship of spiritual guidance which the story of Khidr and Moses illustrates. Unfortunately, in relation to the importance of this relationship across traditions, the amount of work which has been done is proportionately small.<sup>34</sup>

As we explore the narrative of Moses and Khidr and trace the evolution of some of its exegetical contexts, we will be able to witness how this story has been interpreted and applied to the master-disciple relationship. How has this story illuminated aspects of the role of the teacher among Sufis? What is a teacher? How does he teach? How is the teacher's authority integrated – or at odds with – textual and institutional expressions of authority? How have the Sufis pulled this thread from scripture to exegesis to institutional application?

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<sup>34</sup> Some of the best work on spiritual guidance and the master-disciple relationship includes: (Sister) Donald Corcoran, "Spiritual Guidance" *Christian Spirituality* vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 1993); idem, "The Spiritual Guide: Midwife of the Higher Spiritual Self," in *Abba: Guides to Wholeness and Holiness East and West* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982); I. Hadot, "The Spiritual Guide," in A.H. Armstrong, ed. *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 436-459; Stuart Smithers, "Spiritual Guide," in Mircea Eliade, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987); Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations* 1:2 (Spring 1983):1-23. Martin Buber's works on the *zaddikim* are extremely descriptive, especially Martin Buber, *The Legend of the Baal Shem Tov* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954); and idem., *Tales of the Hasidim* 2 vols. (New York: Schocken Books, 1947-48). On the Hermetic tradition see Brian Copenhaven, "Introduction," *Hermetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) and Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). On the pagan holy man, see Garth Fowden, "The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* (1982), 33-59. Some sources for this topic in Buddhism include: Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*. (New York: Vintage, 1951, 1983). Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile*. (New York: Harper, 1990). For the Hindu tradition consult Daniel Gold, *The Lord as Guru: Hindi Sants in North Indian Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Francis Acharya, "The Guru: the Spiritual Father in the Hindu Tradition," in *Abba: Guides to Wholeness and Holiness East and West* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1982). Evocative descriptions of mentoring and companionship with a master appear in Lex Hixon, *Great Swan: Meetings with Ramakrishna* (Burdett, NY: Larson Publications, 1992, 1996), 20, 32, 61, 71, 84, 157-158, 171, 189,

### *Structure of this Work*

In order to explore these and other questions, in the next chapter (Chapter Two) we will begin with a review the development of an exegetical corpus around this Qur'anic narrative. First we will review the Qur'anic text which is the core narrative of the Islamic figure of al-Khidr. Then we will integrate the first horizon of commentary, the material directly conveyed from the Prophet Muhammad in the collections of reports known collectively as hadith. Chapter Two concludes with a preliminary consideration of the genre of Quranic commentary (tafsir) and the importance of Sufi tafsirs. These tasks are laid out in the second chapter of this work. In Chapter Two we also summarize the culmination of the tradition of specialized Qur'an commentary as its classical period is synthesized in the work of al-Tabari. After establishing this context we will present original translations of three sections of Sufi tafsirs treating the story of Moses and Khidr (Chapter Three). Then we will consider this collective body of exegesis in its intertextual and historical perspective (Chapter Four). Finally we proceed to consider the evolution and variation of the role of al-Khidr in a variety of hagiographical and literary sources (Chapter Five). And we conclude with observations and indications about the continuing relevance of Khidr for future inquiry. (Chapter Six).



### *Khidr as Master, Mentor, and Guide*

It seems to be an unstated assumption that the story of Moses and Khidr involves Khidr in the role of teacher, mentor, or guide. This explicit categorization evolved gradually. Its seeds lie in the narrative's use of terms for learning, knowledge, and guidance. In the hadith literature (the reports of the words, acts, and decisions of the Prophet Muhammad), we find no clues of this identification of Khidr as a teacher. We do find in the hadith an analogy drawn from the story to the desideratum of a scholar's persistence in the pursuit of knowledge; but there is still yet no reference to Khidr as a teacher at this stage. Even in the classical tafsir of al-Tabari discussed in Chapter Two, we do not yet find this association explicitly asserted. The identification of Khidr as an exemplary teacher may have become established prior to classical Sufism, but it is most fully developed in the three Sufi Qur'an commentaries we will treat in this work.

By the period of these Sufi tafsirs (4<sup>th</sup> A.H. / 11<sup>th</sup> C.E. to 7<sup>th</sup> A.H. / 14<sup>th</sup> C.E. centuries) a typology of teachers had emerged. To begin, we have the traditional terms for Sufi teachers: *shaykh* (Ar., elder, or master); *murshid* (Ar., guide); *pir* (Pers., elder). In the typology which emerges by the 4<sup>th</sup> / 11<sup>th</sup> century we find a categorization of three types of teachers: (1) the instructing teacher (*shaykh al-ta'lim*), who conveys knowledge in a the sense of following a curriculum of study; (2) the training or mentoring master (*shaykh al-tarbiyya*, also called *shaykh al-suhba*). This type of teacher provides close spiritual guidance to the disciple in the form of the training of

his soul throughout the unfolding of his spiritual life and practice. In this sense the contact with a living master is analogous to a patient's need for the direct attention of a physician. (3) The third category is not explicitly a type of shaykh, but rather, a type of affiliation to a secondary or additional guiding shaykh. This affiliation is accrued through the initiation of blessing (*bay'a al-tabarruk*). Among these distinctions of teachers and affiliations we find different types of activities which we might loosely call teaching. Within the teaching relationship with an instructing teacher, we find the type of lecture and book learning associated with schooling. Here the *content* of the work conveyed is paramount. But in the second and third category, that of the training or mentoring shaykh, we are faced with a greater diversity of activities in which the *process* of training is paramount. Here we find the teaching relationship as a training (*tarbiyya*) in action (*tasrif*) involving at times silence, charisma (*baraka*), and requiring a strong bond or connection (*rabita*).<sup>35</sup> All of these activities transpire within the framework of a companionship of mentoring and discipleship called *suhba*. The term *suhba* involves shades of meaning which describe all three of these activities: companionship, mentoring, and discipleship. These distinctions will be further explored in Chapter Four of this work.

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<sup>35</sup> For discussions of training masters (*shaykh at-tarbiyya*) and instructing masters (*shaykh al-ta'lim*), the following are helpful: Muhsin Mahdi, *ibid.*, 3-14. John Renard, "Introduction," to Ibn 'Abbad of Ronda, *Letters on the Sufi Path*. trans. J. Renard. (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 25-26; cf. *ibid.*, 185-188. Arthur Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: the Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Shaykh* (Columbia: SC, University of South Carolina Press, 1998). Johann G.J. Ter Haar, "The Importance of the Spiritual Guide in the Naqshabandi Order," in *The Legacy of Mediaeval*

## *The Shaykh and the Sunna*

One potentially problematic aspect of this paradigm is the question of the relationship of these structures with the pattern of authority and legitimation inscribed in the *sunna*. The *sunna*, the exemplary body of the Prophet Muhammad's words, acts, and decisions is conveyed in the genre of the hadith. Through knowledge and application of the *sunna*, the ethics, practice and spirituality of Islamic life is made manifest. It is the Prophet Muhammad's life as a model for Islamic life that gives the *sunna* its tangible relevance. In the minds of the Sufi commentators with whom we are dealing and in the minds of their contemporary colleagues, we find the conviction that the Sufi master (shaykh) is the representative or living link to the Prophet Muhammad. A very sensitive reading of the nature of prophetic *sunna* has been offered by Marilyn Waldman:

In every "founded" religious tradition, maintaining proximity to the founder has been an important source of legitimacy and authority, just as arguments about how to establish that proximity have been a source of conflict. In the Islamic tradition, the word *sunnah* has been the focal point of such issues...[S]unnah comes from a root that is concretely associated with honing or molding, with something firmly rooted, like a tooth (*sinn*). *Sunnah*, by extension came to mean habitual practice, customary procedure or action, norm, standard, or "usage sanctioned by tradition....[S]unnah quickly came to be associated with the exemplary, imitable, normative words, deeds, and silent approval of the Prophet himself....[I]t may have been the very size of the corpus [of "news" or "reports" (*hadith*) from the companions of the Prophet] that not only encouraged selectivity but also promoted and reflected, disagreement about the norms to be derived from it....At the popular level and especially among the Sufis (mystics), Muhammad became the soul's guide and the perfect universal human, showing people how to behave in the presence of God..."<sup>36</sup>

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*Persian Sufism*. Ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1992), 311-21.

<sup>36</sup> Marilyn Robinson Waldman, "Sunnah" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*. ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987).

Among the Sufis, the conviction emerged that the shaykh is the embodiment and transmitter of the prophetic *sunna*, a “soul’s guide,” as Waldman expresses it. This characteristic is described by Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi where he compares companionship with one’s shaykh to the loyalty shown to the Prophet Muhammad by his companions:

The master in the midst of his followers is like the prophet in the midst of his community...He [a disciple] should behave toward the shaykh like the Companions with the Prophet in following the ethics of the Qur’an: “O you who believe! Do not assert yourselves before Allah and His Messenger, but fear Allah, for Allah is He who knows all things. O you who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him in talk, as you may speak loud to one another lest your deeds become vain and you perceive not.” (Surat al-Hujarat [49].1-2)<sup>37</sup>

Writing from his prison cell in Baghdad in defense of his orientations toward Sufism and the *sunna*, the martyr ‘Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani (1098-1131) argues for the essential role of the spiritual master, citing and applying a number of prophetic and mystical precedents:

Another matter over which they have criticized me concerns certain chapters wherein I have spoken of the need of a neophyte for a spiritual instructor to conduct him to the path of truth and to guide him on the straight road, so that he may not stray from the right way. A sound tradition [a hadith of the Prophet] informs us that God’s Messenger (God bless him) said, “Whoever dies without an imam dies the death of a pagan.” Abu Yazid al-Bistami said, “If a man has no master, his imam is Satan.” Amr b. Sinan al-Manjibi, one of the great Sufi shaykhs, said, “A man who has not been to school with a master, such a man is an imposter.” The Sufi expositors of the true reality are unanimous in declaring that he who has no shaykh is without religion.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Abu al-Najib al-Suhrawardi, *Kitab Adab al-Muridin*. trans. Menahim Milson, *A Sufi Rule for Novices* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 46-47.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani, ‘Complaint of a Stranger Exiled from Home,’ trans. A.J. Arberry, in idem, *A Sufi Martyr: the Apologia of ‘Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. 1969), 33.

The centrality of the spiritual master's role to the Sufi path is expressed succinctly in the opening statement of a work by one of Ibn 'Arabi's contemporaries, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Andalusian teacher Abu Madyan:

The primary requirement for the aspirant is companionship (*suhba*) with a practicing spiritual master who is knowledgeable, fears God, is conversant with both the exoteric and the esoteric sciences, and is aware of the Transcendent Truth and Reality.<sup>39</sup>

As we shall see, Abu Madyan's description of the qualities of the spiritual master matches a number of the characteristics attributed to Khidr.

Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri asserted the centrality and value of the shaykh's role as a continuous function originating from the beginnings of Islam:

During the entire Islamic era, there has always been a master of Sufism who possessed the science of unity. At all times, under the leadership of the Sufis, the leading scholars of the age have submitted to that master, humbling themselves to him and asking his blessing....Thus it is necessary for the disciple to study with a master, and if he does not have a master, he will never succeed. Abu Yazid said, "One who has no master has Satan for a leader." I heard the master Abu 'Ali [al-Daqqaq] say, "The tree that grows by itself without a gardener puts forth leaves, but it does not bear fruit. Similar is the disciple who has no master from whom he can learn his path, one breath at a time. He remains a worshiper of his own desire and does not attain success."<sup>40</sup>

Sometimes hagiographical legends of Khidr highlight the importance of following one's own shaykh over the temptation to involve Khidr directly as one's own mentor. Khidr serves in some instances as the model of the master; in other

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<sup>39</sup> Abu Madyan Shu'ayb ibn al-Husayn al-Ansari, *Bidayat al-Murid (Basic Principles of the Sufi Path)* trans. Vincent J. Cornell, in idem, ed. and trans., *The Way of Abu Madyan: the Works of Abu Madyan Shu'ayb* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1996), 54.

<sup>40</sup> Abu al-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim al-Qushayri, "The Testament to Disciples," from *al-Risala al-Qushayriyya (The Epistle of al-Qushayri)* Ed. 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud and Mahmud ibn al-Sharif (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1974), pp. 731-752. Translated by Carl W. Ernst in *Teachings of*

instances he represents an alluring test to the aspirant's exclusive loyalty to God and the Prophet Muhammad. Vincent Cornell comments on the historical trend in which the model of the spiritual master in Sufism shifts from Khidr to the Prophet Muhammad:

After the sixth/twelfth century, when the efforts of al-Ghazali and earlier "orthodox" mystics to harmonize Sufism with Islamic legalism had reached full fruition, Khidr began to lose his axial position in Sufi doctrine and began to be replaced as a model for esoteric spirituality by the Prophet Muhammad himself, who was now seen as the ultimate synthesis of saintly and prophetic attributes.<sup>41</sup>

This tendency, in its latent form, is hinted at in hagiographical reports such as this one concerning Ibrahim al-Khawwas, who when asked about the wonders he had seen, replied:

"Many wonders," he replied, "but the most wonderful was that the Apostle Khidr begged me to let him associate with me and I refused. Not that I desired any better companion, but I feared that I should depend on him rather than on God, and that my trust in God would be impaired by consorting with him..."<sup>42</sup>

This issue is articulated more explicitly in a story about Jalaladdin Rumi (1207-1273). One day while Rumi is teaching, Khidr appears to one of Rumi's disciples in the corner of the teaching hall and instructs him to hold fast to their teacher, Jalaladin Rumi, rather than becoming absorbed in the marvel of Khidr's visit:

When Jalal was quite young, he was one day preaching on the subject of Moses and Khidr. One of his disciples noticed a stranger seated in a corner, paying great attention and every now and then saying: "Good! Quite true! Quite correct! He might

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*Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), 151-152.

<sup>41</sup> Vincent J. Cornell, *Mirrors of Prophethood: The Evolving Image of the Spiritual Master in the Western Maghrib from the Origins of Sufism to the End of the Sixteenth Century*. (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, 1989), 71.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*. trans. R. A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1911), 153.

have been the third one with us two!” The disciple surmised that he might be Khidr. He therefore seized hold of the stranger’s skirt, and asked for his spiritual aid. “Oh,” said the stranger, “rather seek assistance from Jalal as we all do. Every occult saint of God is the loving and admiring friend of him.” So saying, he managed to disengage his skirt from the disciple’s hold, and instantly disappeared. The disciple went to pay his respects to Jalal, who at once addressed him, saying: “Khidr and Moses, and the prophets, are all friends of mine.” The disciple understood the allusion, and became more devoted at heart to Jalal than he even was before.”<sup>43</sup>

The distinction is critical: an appearance by Khidr can stand either as a model or as a test of loyalty to one’s living shaykh as the embodiment of the Prophetic *sunna* and the key to its practice for the disciple.

### *Khidr as the Embodiment of Inner Knowledge*

As we shall see the Qur’anic narrative ascribes to Khidr the acquisition of an inner knowledge (*‘ilm ladunni*), the unmediated knowledge imparted directly (*ladun*) from God. This association of Khidr as the bearer of inner knowledge has led at least one unidentified 10<sup>th</sup>-century Sufi writer, quoted earlier, to describe Sufism itself as Khidr’s knowledge:

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<sup>43</sup> Shams ud-Din Ahmad al-Aflaki, *Manaqib al-‘Arifin*, translated as *The Legends of the Sufis*. trans. James W. Redhouse (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1881, rpt. 1977), 70. I have revised Redhouse’s version in the following ways: although Redhouse makes it clear through his citation of the Qur’anic verses of the story of Khidr and Moses that the stranger in the corner is Khidr, he chose (perhaps for the ease of his nineteenth-century readers) to substitute the name Elias, based on traditions which associate Khidr and Elijah. I have also omitted Redhouse’s explanatory parenthetical remarks which in the context of this work are redundant.

The sciences of Sufism are esoteric knowledge, which is the knowledge of inspiration, and an unmediated secret between God (the mighty and majestic) and his friends [i.e., the saints]; it is knowledge from the presence. God the mighty And the majestic said [that Al-Khidr was one] “whom we taught knowledge from our presence” (Qur’an 18.65). That is the special knowledge which is the sign of the saints and the reality of wisdom...When asked about this esoteric knowledge, the Prophet said,] “It is knowledge between God and his friends of which neither proximate angel nor any one of his creatures is aware.”<sup>44</sup>

This passage demonstrates the degree to which the story of Khidr and Moses can and has served among the verses of the Qur’an as a signature note of Sufism. As the quotations we have given suggest, the story of Khidr and Moses offers a rich lexicon of terms and symbols which can inform the role of the teacher and his inner knowledge.

What implications emerge from the story of Khidr and Moses for the study of personal authority and charisma? What is the authority of one who serves as a teacher or mentor to a Prophet? Such stories as those of Khidr the Green Man, the first Muslim Prophet Adam, and Joseph point – for some esoteric exegetes – to a radical spiritual anthropology, in which the human being becomes a theophanic mediator. For example, in the commentary of Ruzbihan Baqli we will find such intimations of theophanic witness in human form in his discussion of the beautiful face of the youth (p. 594). One of the earliest expressions of this theophanic witness in human form is the Sufi “*hadith* of the vision (*ru’ya*):”

I have seen my Lord in the form of the greatest beauty, as a youth with abundant hair, seated on the Throne of grace; he was clad in a garment of gold [or a green robe, according to a variant]; on his hair a golden mitre; on his feet golden sandals.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Adab al-Muluk* (10<sup>th</sup> century, unattributed) selection translated by in Carl Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 62. See fn. 16.

<sup>45</sup> Hammad ibn Salama (d. 157/774) quoted in Henri Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 272.



How does such theophanic witness in human form complement or challenge the authority of other hierophanies -- textual and institutional? These challenges are played out in the Sufi *tafsirs*.

In this sense it is not surprising that some have extended themselves greatly to apply their understandings of the nature of this elusive figure named Khidr. When a 12<sup>th</sup> century Persian heresiographer Abu 'l-Fath Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (1076-1153) reflected on India, he was transfixed by the figure of the Buddha. The Buddha he learned was unborn and undying (in the Buddha's Wisdom Body, *Dharmakaya*). Also the eternal Buddha appeared in different forms, places, and times with the same teaching. Thus al-Shahrastani explained the Buddha to his Muslim readers:

There is no one comparable [in the Islamic world] to the Buddha as they have described him -- if they are right in that -- except Khidr, whom Muslims recognize.<sup>46</sup>

In al-Shahrastani's comparison, the figure of the Buddha brings into relief the intimations of theophanic witness which are at once an inspiration and a risk for those who would adopt Khidr as a model of authority in an Islamic context. In our examination of Sufi *tafsirs* we will want to watch for traces of such ambivalence and diversity.

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<sup>46</sup> Abu'l-Fath Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *'Ara' al-Hind* (Views of the Indians) trans. Bruce B. Lawrence in *Shahrastani on the Indian Religions*. (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 43.

## *Khidr as Popular Symbol*

Khidr is not only a paradigmatic and esoteric figure, but also a popular one.<sup>47</sup>

Popular tales present him as a white-bearded man often dressed in green who rescues the distressed from danger. Throughout Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon sacred places are multiply dedicated to Khidr, Ilyas (Elijah), and St. George.<sup>48</sup> In Turkey the Spring-time festival of Hidrellez honors Khidr and Ilyas.<sup>49</sup> Popularly Khidr is known as *Khawwad al-Buhur* "roamer of the seas."<sup>50</sup> In India, as Khwaja Khidr, Khidr embodies the attributes of a river God and is artistically depicted as if he were Matsya Avatara, the fish avatar of Vishnu.<sup>51</sup> In the Alexander Romance, as deputy and cook to

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<sup>47</sup> Wensinck, "Al-Khadir (Al-Khidr)," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960).

<sup>48</sup> A. Augustinovic, *'El-Khadr' and the Prophet Elijah* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1972). This work surveys holy sites dedicated (often mutually) to Khidr, Elijah, and St. George and traces archetypal commonalities shared between the three figures. These include sites in such central places as the Bab al-Khidr (Khidr's Gate) in the Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem and the Qubba al-Khidr (Khidr's dome) at the northwest corner of the Temple Mount. Among masjids (mosques) dedicated to Khidr there exists one in Karbala and one in Samarkand.

<sup>49</sup> Currently celebrated on the Gregorian calendar dates of May 5 (evening) and May 6, this holiday was observed on the Rumeli calendar on the same date as the feast day of St. George, April 23. H.S. Haddad cites Malalas *Chronicles* to assert that the date has been continued from feast days of Zeus (H.S. Haddad, "'Georgic' Cults and Saints of the Levant," *Numen* 16 [1969], 28-29). For a detailed explanation of the relationship between St. George and Khidr, see J. Sadan, s.v. "Ludd," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* V, 798-803. Discussions of popular traditions and practices related to al-Al-Khidr appear in the following sources: P.N. Boratov, s.v. "Khadir-Ilyas," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Warren Walker and Ahmet E. Uysal, "An Ancient God in Modern Turkey," *Journal of American Folklore* 86, no. 341 (July-Sept. 1973), 286-289. F.W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 319-336. Lucy M. J. Garnett, *Mysticism and Magic in Turkey*. (London: Pitman, 1912), 22-34. A selection of Anatolian legends of Khidr (Turkish, Hızir) is presented in Warren S. Walker and Ahmet E. Uysal, *More Tales Alive in Turkey* (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech. University Press, 1992), 2-3; 271-6.

<sup>50</sup> H.S. Haddad, *ibid.*, 34. Warren Walker and Ahmet E. Uysal, "An Ancient God in Modern Turkey," *ibid.*, 286-289. F.W. Hasluck, *ibid.*, 319-336.

<sup>51</sup> M. L. Dames, "Khwadja Al-Khidr," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. A.K. Coomaraswamy, "Khwaja Al-Khidr and the Fountain of Life in the Tradition of Persian and Mughal Art." *Ars Islamica*. I, Part 2 (1934), 173-182. Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 168.

Alexander the Great, he achieved immortality by drinking the water of eternal life. Here again he acts as a guide, guiding Alexander through the land of darkness before discovering and drinking the water of eternal life.<sup>52</sup>

Within the Chapter of the Cave (*Surat al-Kahf*), in the Qur'an the story of Moses' journey with Khidr is complemented by two narratives popular in late antiquity: the story of the Companions of the Cave (*Ashab al-Kahf*) (18.9-26) and the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, or Alexander the Great (*Iskandar*) which immediately follows the narrative of Khidr (18. 83-98). Together these stories treat themes of resurrection and intimations of immortality. The story of the Companions of the Cave suggests God's power to resurrect life; the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn has been popularly understood in terms of the legend of Alexander's quest for the waters of eternal life. The prevailing classical and popular identification of Khidr as Alexander's deputy and cook who discovers and drinks the waters of eternal life, coupled with the sequential order of the stories of Khidr and Dhu'l-Qarnayn in the Qur'an, creates a juxtaposition which invites intertextual examination of the two narratives.<sup>53</sup> As we shall explore, from the outset, Qur'an commentaries have linked the stories of Khidr and Alexander, but this intertextuality implies and requires careful interpretation.

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<sup>52</sup> Minoo Southgate, *Iskandarnamah: a Persian Medieval Alexander-Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

<sup>53</sup> Mohammed Arkoun asserts that the 18<sup>th</sup> Sura of the Qur'an contains the most "mythical" passages of Qur'anic text opening it to the greatest latitude in the exegetical act of mystical interpretation, or *ta'wil*. See idem., "Lecture de la Sourate 18," in *Lectiures du Coran*. (Paris: Editions G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982), 69-86.

*Khidr in the West*

Khidr has traveled West as well. Possibly the earliest European reference to Khidr appears in Goethe's *West-osterlicher Divan*, a work consciously modeled on the poetry of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Persian Sufi poet Hafiz.<sup>54</sup> In this opening section titled "Hijra, or Flight," Goethe expresses a desire to seek refuge and rejuvenation in the East at the spring of Khidr:

North and South and West are crumbling,  
Thrones are falling, kingdoms trembling:  
Come flee away to purer East,  
There on patriarch's air to feast,  
There with love and drink and song  
Khiser's spring shall make thee young.<sup>55</sup>

Here Goethe's affinity for the Persian poetry of Hafiz and his interest in alchemical immortality flow together to make Khidr and the Water of Eternal Life one of the initial symbolic allusions of the poem and its *Divan*.<sup>56</sup>

The psychiatrist Carl Jung devoted an entire article, and sections of other work, to his hermetic-alchemical interpretation of the story of Khidr.<sup>57</sup> Here Jung offers his

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<sup>54</sup> Khwaja Shams ad-Din Muhammad Hafiz-i Shirazi (d. 793/1391), who enjoys the greatest prestige and popularity among Persian poets, is said to have been initiated by Khidr.

<sup>55</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Reineke Fox, West-Eastern Divan, and Achilleid*, trans. by Alexander Rogers (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890), 199-200.

<sup>56</sup> On Goethe's alchemical interests see Ronald Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952). An Austrian novel from 1916, Gustav Meyrink's *Das Grune Gesichte* (The Green Face), features a character named Chidher Green. (The spelling "Chidher" is the German transliteration of "Khidr.") The novel is briefly profiled in Antoine Faivre *The Eternal Hermes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1995), 116-119. Faivre associates Chidher with Hermes and misses his identification as Khidr. Nonetheless, the name of the character (Chidher/Khidr) as well as associations within the novel point to Elijah and Ahasueras. Earlier generations of Western scholars, as represented for example, in the article "al-Khadir/al-Khidr" in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, have asserted associations between Khidr and Elijah and Ahasueras.

archetypal interpretation of the master-disciple relationship as it is embodied between Khidr and Moses:

Al-Khidr may well be a symbol of the self. Moses accepts him as a higher consciousness and looks up to him for instruction. Then follow those incomprehensible deeds which show ego-consciousness reacts to the superior guidance of the self through the twists and turns of fate. To the initiate who is capable of transformation, it is a comforting tale; to the obedient believer, an exhortation not to murmur against Allah's incomprehensible omnipotence. Al-Khidr symbolizes not only the higher wisdom but also a way of acting which is in accord with this wisdom and transcends reason. Anyone hearing such a mystery tale will recognize himself in the questing Moses and the forgetful Joshua, and the tale shows him how the immortality-bringing rebirth comes about.<sup>58</sup>

The novelist David James Duncan in an unpublished short story, "On Mortal and Immortal Flyfishing Guides," (1997)<sup>59</sup> portrays Khidr as his "one and only favorite flyfishing coach": Duncan explains that flyfishing occurs at the surface of the water 'where two seas (air and water) meet'; Khidr teaches that necessary fishing skill: intuition (unmediated inner knowledge).

In popular culture, the story of Khidr and Moses has been presented in the martial arts film, *Circle of Iron* (1983) In this film, reported to be the last project

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<sup>57</sup> Carl G. Jung, "A Typical Set of Symbols Illustrating the Process of Transformation," *Collected Works* Vol. 9, pt. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1959, 1969), 135-147. Jung explores the role of the "magical traveling companion" as the water of life which nurtures the self, using the examples of Khidr [and Moses], Krishna [and Arjuna], and Jesus [and the disciples on the road to Emmaus]), in his essay "Dream Symbols of the Individuation Process," in *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*. Bollingen Series xxx.4 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 375-6. Jung refers to Khidr as "the archetype of the self" and, in a striking formulation, "the human personification of Allah," in *Flying Saucers: a Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky* (New York: New American Library, 1959), 32, cf. p. 111. For biographical background on Jung's interest in Khidr, see Nicholas Battye, "Al-Khidr in the Opus of Jung: the Teaching of Surrender," in *Jung and the Monotheisms*. ed. Joyce Ryce-Menuhin (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 166-191.

<sup>58</sup> Jung, "A Typical Set of Symbols Illustrating the Process of Transformation." In *Collected Works* Vol. 9 pt. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University, 1959, 1969), 141

<sup>59</sup> David James Duncan, "On Mortal and Immortal Flyfishing Guides" (unpublished, 1997).

involving Bruce Lee, and shot in the Muslim culture of Indonesia, David Carradine plays a Taoist master who takes his aspiring disciple on a journey with tests and challenges which match in exact detail those of the Qur'anic narrative of Moses and Khidr.

### *The Quest for the Pre-Islamic Khidr*

Many have looked to alleged pagan parallels as precedents for Khidr, focusing on extra-Islamic contexts in a quest for alleged origins. To this end, such scholars have pointed to rituals and myths of vegetation gods and immortals as sources from which – allegedly -- the Khidr story has been derived. For example, Khidr has been linked with what one scholar calls “Georgic” figures, including in addition to George and Elijah, a number of Mediterranean Baals: Baal-Zeus, Baal-Saphon, and Baal-Hadad.<sup>60</sup> This association is in part based on shared feast days. But parallels cannot serve as proof of origins. And origins are not necessarily fruitful explanations of the role of a text in guiding actual practice and knowledge within a tradition.

Western scholars have often emphasized the parallels between the narrative of Khidr and three allegedly earlier stories from other traditions: the epic of Gilgamesh, the Alexander romance, and the story of Elijah and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi.<sup>61</sup> The

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<sup>60</sup> H.S. Haddad, *ibid.*, 28-29; 35-36. An even more close resemblance among Baals would be that of the Libo-Phoenician Baal Hamon, an oracle of the god of the sea, sought out by Alexander the Great (with whom al-Khidr is often associated). Baal Hamon is discussed in Oric Bates, *Eastern Lybians* (London: Macmillan, 1914). I am grateful to Vincent Cornell for this reference.

<sup>61</sup> Wensinck, Arent Jan. s.v. “al-Khadir (al-Khidr)” *Encyclopedia of Islam* II. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978. James Jervis, *ibid.*, is devoted to fulfilling this project of source-criticism and comparative

epic of Gilgamesh features a character named Utnapishtim. It is Utnapishtim whom the hero Gilgamesh seeks out in his quest to overcome death and suffering. Utnapishtim, whose name is usually translated as “He who saw life,” “came to possess everlasting life” when after the Flood, the god Enlil blessed him and his wife and placed them “in the distance at the mouth of two rivers.”<sup>62</sup> His chief epithet is “the Faraway.” The similarities are attractive from a literary-typological perspective, even if inapplicable to questions and contexts of Islamic exegesis. Scholars of earlier generations stressed a number of convenient associations between this figure and Khidr: Utnapishtim is also known as Khasisatra (vaguely suggesting a phonetic similarity with the name “Khidr”); Utnapishtim dwells at the distant *ina pi narati*, the mouth of the rivers (allegedly correlate to the *majma‘ al-bahrain*, the meeting of the two seas); and like Khidr, Utnapishtim was given eternal life.<sup>63</sup> Although the typological similarities between Utnapishtim and Khidr are intriguing and even enriching from a literary perspective, so too are the parallels between Utnapishtim and Noah. Furthermore the question of how the lost text of Gilgamesh could even have served as a reference for Quranic revelation remains unanswerable.

Some of the motifs of the Khidr story also appear in the Alexander Romance of

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analysis of origins. On the question of chronological precedence, the first two of these stories (Gilgamesh and Alexander) are indisputably earlier); the claim that the story of Elijah and Yehoshua ben Levi is earlier than the Qur’an will be critiqued in chapter two.

<sup>62</sup> N.K. Sandars, trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin Books, 1960), 107, 113, 125.

<sup>63</sup> Friedlander, Israel. “Khidr.” *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961 and idem, “Khidr” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915), VII: 693-695. Wensinck, Arent Jan. s.v. “al-Khadir (al-Khidr),” *ibid.*

Pseudo-Callisthanes: Alexander's cook, Andreas (alleged by earlier scholars to be the Greek precedent of the Arabic name Idris)<sup>64</sup> washes a salted fish in the spring of the water of life and the fish comes to life and swims.<sup>65</sup> What one may take from these associations is that stories of quests for immortality naturally share common symbols and motifs. Whether or not sources of derivation may be identified, it is of greater value to explore the reasons and intentions behind adopting the content, associations, or prestige of such precedents.

In addition to the Alexander Romance, a story of Elijah presents interesting parallels. In an 11<sup>th</sup> century Jewish story written by Nissim ben Jacob ibn Shahin of Kairouan, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (220-250 C.E.) is guided by Elijah on a journey which resembles the journey of Moses and Khidr. Elijah performs three baffling and outrageous acts similar to those performed by Khidr.<sup>66</sup> We shall comment on the significance of this parallel, and questions surrounding claims of derivation in the next chapter.

Others have cast their typological net to include Osiris (he was green, a river

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<sup>64</sup> s.v. "Idris," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*

<sup>65</sup> Richard Stoneman, trans. *The Greek Alexander Romance*. (London: Penguin, 1991), 121-124.

<sup>66</sup> Nissim ben Jacob ibn Shahin (990-1062 C.E.) *An Elegant Composition concerning Relief after Adversity*. (Translation of *Hibbur Yafeh me-hay-Yeshu'ah* by William M. Brinner.) (New Haven: Yale, 1977), cf. pp. 13-16. The motifs: (1) a family hosts the travelers; in the morning Elijah causes their cow to die; (2) a wealthy man offers no hospitality and Elijah rebuilds his wall; (3) when at a rich synagogue they are offered only bread and salt, Elijah wishes that God will give them many chiefs; (4) when a poor community hosts them, Elijah asks that God grant only one chief. The interpretations: (1) the cow was substituted for the wife slated to die; (2) the wall had under it a treasure which the stingy man did not deserve; (3) a place with many chiefs is bound to be ruined; (4) those under one chief can prosper. The moral: If the wicked prosper, it is to their disadvantage; when a righteous person is distressed or tried, s/he is being delivered from a worse ordeal.



god, and immortal)<sup>67</sup> and Melchizedek (he was an immortal initiator who trained a prophet, Abraham). Ilse Lichtenstader presents Khidr as a figure derived from Osiris.<sup>68</sup> In his translation of the Qur'an Yusuf 'Ali compares Khidr to Melchizedek, "King of Salem and Priest of God Most High" (Gen. 14:18-20),<sup>69</sup> represented by the writer of Hebrews (Heb 7:3) as an immortal.

Brannon Wheeler<sup>70</sup> suggests that Muslim commentators related the story to the Alexander Romance not to trace sources, but to signal both their own expertise and the prestige of the Prophet Muhammad by associating Alexander the Great as a forerunner. For the same reason, Wheeler suggests, commentators compared Khidr to Elijah to make Khidr his Islamic counterpart.<sup>71</sup> In the next chapter we shall examine these correspondences more closely.

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<sup>67</sup> I thank Orval Wintermute for first pointing out this correspondence to me.

<sup>68</sup> Ilse Lichtenstader, "Origin and Interpretation of Some Koranic Symbols," *Arabic and Islamic in Honor H.A.R. Gibb*. ed. George Makdisi (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 426-436. This article extracts significance from every similarity between narratives of Osiris and the narrative of Khidr. Khidr's wall is correlated to Osiris' building of cities. Osiris' phallus swallowed by a fish is tied to Moses's fish which leads him to Khidr. *Kharq al-Safina* (the breaking of the boat) is linked to the possibility of obliterating the ferry boat of death.

<sup>69</sup> 'Abdallah Yusuf 'Ali, trans. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, new revised ed. (Brentwood, MA: Amana, 1991), 727, fn 2411.

<sup>70</sup> Brannon Wheeler, "The Jewish Origins of Qur'an 18:65-82?" *ibid.*, and *idem*, "Moses or Alexander? Early Islamic Exegesis of Qur'an 18. 60-65," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 57, no. 3, (July 1998): 153-171.

<sup>71</sup> *Idem*, "The Jewish Origins of Qur'an 18:65-82?", 165.

*Khidr in Sufi Qur'an Commentary*

Such comparisons between Khidr and pre- and extra-Islamic sources disclose structural similarities, new perspectives, and helpful models for identifying features of the story. But all such comparisons demonstrate an interesting disregard for Islamic meanings and applications. How have Muslims understood and applied this narrative?

Sufi commentators find in this story categories of knowledge, mystical experience, and spiritual training. They adapt the narrative's lexicon to unearth a mystical substrate. The process of mentoring companionship (*suhba*) directs the disciple's journey into the realm of knowledge, experience, and training realized through unveiling (*kashf*) and witnessing/contemplation (*mushahada*). In the companionship of *suhba*, mentoring is a bridge to inner knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) beyond words, or concepts. This notion, to which al-Qushayri alludes, is directly asserted by al-Qashani: "All of the dialogues are in the language of a [spiritual] state."<sup>72</sup>

Of all Quranic narrative, it is this story of Moses and Khidr which has historically and typologically provided a model for the legitimacy and intricacies of the mentoring or master disciple relationship. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters of this work, its characterization, plot, and symbolism point to the possibilities of imparting knowledge through mentoring companionship (*suhba*). Further this story

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<sup>72</sup> Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Lata'if al-isharat*, ed. Ibrahim Basyuni (6 vols.; Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1968-71): vol 2, 768.

opens a vista of interpretation which explicitly transcends the explicit formulas of legal interpretation. And this dimension is demonstrated clearly by the plot of the story in which the spiritual guide uses few words to teach. Rather than using words of instruction, he employs action and silence. And here the learning that is required is not based on a concept, but rather in a virtue, the virtue of patience (*sabr*). Further the transmission of this knowledge involves a type of etiquette (*adab*) and a process of mentoring or companionship (*suhba*). Does this story hold keys to the master-disciple relationship? The answers to this, and related questions, comprise the core of the work which follows.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FACES OF KHIDR AS EXCEPTIONAL SERVANT, MYSTICAL MENTOR, AND POPULAR PARADIGM: FROM QUR'AN AND HADITH TO SUFI TAFSIRS

*Synopsis.* This chapter introduces Khidr, the companion of Moses (*Sahib Musa*), and addresses two questions: (1) How do Qur'an, Hadith, and other original sources interpret the figure of Khidr and his companionship (*suhba*) with Moses? (2) How have Sufi Qur'an commentaries developed the theme of this companionship to articulate and legitimate the mentoring relationship between guide (*murshid*) and disciple (*murid*) along with the types of knowledge and mystical states produced by this training?

#### ***A Hidden Treasure: The Value of Studying Khidr***

Between the first and second question lies a range of literary and institutional expressions distinctive to Islamic piety. The story of Khidr and Moses appears in the Qur'an, the scripture revealed to Islam's last prophet Muhammad. The scriptural account is supplemented in the Hadith, thematically-organized collections of Muhammad's words and deeds. As primary sources, both Qur'an and Hadith inform Quranic commentary (*tafsir*). Hagiographic literature, and Sufi discourses (*mal'fuz*) presuppose the value of all three: Qur'an, Hadith, and *tafsir*. The *locus classicus* of

the narrative of Khidr and Moses appears in the Qur'an in Sura al-Kahf, the Chapter of the Cave (18.60-82). It is a text alluding to a knowledge outside of texts, gained through companionship (*suhba*) with a mentor.

Why write about a mysterious unnamed and obscure figure in the Qur'an? Four answers come to mind. First, whatever is in the Qur'an, even among its most mysterious or ambiguous references is revealed and therefore commands our attention. The Quranic story of Khidr and Moses (Musa) is reinforced liturgically in Islamic life, since the chapter in which it appears is frequently recited in mosques in the mornings before the Friday community prayer.<sup>1</sup> Thus this narrative demands special attention as the subject of a significant ritual performance. Second, this mysterious figure who guides Moses on a journey of learning, informs and complements the Qur'an's concept of prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and contributes to the general concept of sainthood. A study of the figure of Khidr promises to shed light on sainthood in both its inner aspect as intimacy with God (*walaya*) and its outer manifestation as spiritual authority (*wilaya*).<sup>2</sup> Third, one stream of Quranic commentary has accepted the "truth" of this

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*. trans., Benjamin Clark. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 91.

<sup>2</sup> This distinction identifying *walaya* as the inner aspect of sainthood and *wilaya* as the outer aspect is taken from Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998). Cornell argues for this distinction based on literary and socio-historical usage in the Maghrib which is applicable throughout the Muslim world. This distinction complements that of al-Qushayri (986-1072), whose Qur'an commentary on Khidr and Moses will be discussed in this work. Al-Qushayri articulates two meanings of sainthood --one passive, and one active -- by interpreting the word *wali* in terms of two grammatical paradigms: (1) *fa'yl* -- the passive meaning that God takes possession (*yatawalla*) of the saint's affairs, and (2) *faa'il* -- an active sense of a saint as one who undertakes worship and observance. For al-Qushayri the true saint fulfills both meanings: God takes possession of the affairs, and the saint actively worships and obeys God. (al-

mysterious figure as paradigmatic of relationships of spiritual guidance. An understanding of the story of Khidr and Moses promises to contribute to an understanding of the sources of authority for the roles of teachers and guides. Furthermore, Khidr's special stature is evidenced by a unique fact of the Qur'an: among the narratives of Moses -- the single most frequently-narrated prophet in the Qur'an -- one finds only two figures who seem to surpass Moses: Muhammad and Khidr.<sup>3</sup> Moses serves as a foreunner to Muhammad and a student of Khidr. Finally, Khidr appears very early in the sequence of hadith collected by Bukhari. Bukhari, one of the earliest, and perhaps most illustrious collector of hadith, uses the story of Khidr and Moses not only as a quoted verse, but retells, interprets, and applies it as a moral precedent and guideline for the proper attitude toward acquiring knowledge.<sup>4</sup> In fact the story of Khidr is the first Quranic narrative to which Bukhari devotes such a full treatment.

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Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism* (Berkeley: Mizan, 1990), pp. 268-269.

<sup>3</sup> Moses narratives encompass 535 verses representing 8% of the content of the Qur'an. By comparison Ibrahim appears in 4%, Jesus in 2%. For the case that the narratives of Musa are aimed at providing a specific model for the challenges to Muhammad in the development of the *umma* in its transition before the triumphal return to Mecca, see Hugh Talat Halman, "*We Have Found Muhammad, a Prophet like Moses*": *How Comparisons between Muhammad and Moses in the Qur'an and Sira are Guided by the Hermeneutics of Genre*. (Duke University, Unpublished Master's Thesis, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad ibn Isma'il b. al-Mughirah al-Bukhari (194-256), *Sahih Bukhari* Volume I, Book 3, Chapters 17 (no. 74), 20 (no. 78), 45 (no. 124). ed. Muhammad Muhsin Khan. Medina: Islamic University, 1976, p. 401.

What Bukhari initiates, others follow and develop. The role of Khidr informs relationships between teacher (*ustadh*) and student (*talib*)<sup>5</sup> and between spiritual guide (*murshid*) and disciple (*murid*). Across a wide range of Islamic discourses and cultures Khidr stands as a model for relationships of spiritual guidance, esoteric explanations of spiritual realities, and the continuous expectation of intervening compassion and deliverance from distress.

In particular, the relationship between Moses and Khidr is presented within a quest for knowledge that characterizes Sufism; it establishes a relationship of *paideia* shared between the guide and the disciple.<sup>6</sup> This journey or quest then comes to be institutionalized in the Sufi Orders (*tariqa/turuq*); it authorizes, even as it impels, a seeker (*murid*) to pursue the spiritual journey under the auspices, guidance, and training (*tarbiyya*) of a *shaykh* (master), *murshid* or *pir* (spiritual guide). The authors of the Sufi *tafsirs* have framed the significance of the narrative of Khidr and Moses in the Qur'an and hadith in terms of the training (*tarbiyya*) of the soul (*nafs*) through the practice of proper conduct (*adab*). The Sufi exegetes accent the way companionship (*suhba*) and right conduct (*adab*) between master and disciple facilitate the training of

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<sup>5</sup> Rosenthal, Franz, *The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970, p. 6; sec. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations* 1:2 (Spring 1983):1-23. Brown explains that the *paideia* of the Christian saints focused on establishing virtue in a person through face to face contact. For a comprehensive discussion of the evolution of this concept, see Werner Jaeger, *Paideia; the Ideals of Greek Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1939.

the soul and help to develop the states of knowledge and experience necessary for the disciple.

***Tracing the Steps: the Narrative of Khidr and Moses in Qur'an and Hadith***

The Qur'an features a narrative in Surat al-Kahf (Sura 18.60-83) which tells of the Prophet Moses seeking and following a "servant from among [God's] servants," with the intention of learning the *rushd* (guidance or spiritual maturity) which this special servant has learned. The servant Khidr is not named in the text of the Qur'an itself. It is the hadith collections of al-Bukhari and Muslim which first record the name. The hadith report that when the Prophet Muhammad was asked who was the companion of Moses (*Sahib Musa*), he answered, "Khidr," the Green One.<sup>7</sup>

First we will present the narrative from the Qur'an and then examine how the two prominent hadith collectors Bukhari and Muslim apply the narrative. What follows is a translation of the Quranic narrative. The narrative is divided under four topical rubrics for reference in the discussions to follow: (1) Moses' quest; (2) the meeting with Khidr; (3) the journey of companionship; and (4) the interpretation and separation:

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<sup>7</sup> The accounts in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* vowel the *laqab* (nickname) as "Khadir." Later traditions and popular usage use the vowel "al-Khidr" and sometimes even the simple form "Khidr." Also, since the letter *dad* in Arabic is in vernacular speech (*'ammiya*) pronounced as a "z," one often hears (and sees) al-Khazir or al-Khizr.



### Moses' Quest for the Meeting of the Two Seas (*Majma ' al-Bahrain*)

60. And when Moses said to his servant (*fata*), "I will not cease until I reach the meeting of the two seas or I will continue for ages."

61. And when they reached the meeting between them, they forgot their fish and it took its way into the sea [through] an opening.

62. And when they had passed on, he [Moses] said to his servant, "Give us our meal; we have encountered on our journey fatigue."

63. He [the servant] said, "Did you see when we came to the rock? Indeed I forgot the fish and it was only Satan that caused me to forget to mention that it took its way into the sea wonderously"

64. He [Moses] said, "This is what we were seeking." So they retraced their footsteps.

### Moses' Meeting with Khidr and their Agreement

65. And he found a servant from among Our servants. We gave him mercy (*rahma*) from Us. And We taught him knowledge from Our Presence (*'allamnahu min ladunna ilma*).

66. Moses said to him, "May I follow you so that you may teach me the guidance (*rushd*). you have learned?"

67. He [Khidr] said, "Indeed, you will not be able to have patience (*sabr*) with me.

68. How can you be patient concerning what your understanding (*khubr*) does not encompass?”

69. He [Moses] said, “You will find me, God willing (*in sha’ Allah*) patient and I will not disobey you in anything.”

70. He [Khidr] said, “If you would follow me, then do not ask me about anything until I mention (*dhikr*) it to you.”

### The Journey of the Companions

71. So they proceeded until when they rode in the boat, he broke it. He [Moses] said, “Did you intend to drown its people? You have done a strange thing.”

72. He [Khidr] answered, “Did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me?”

73. He [Moses] said, “Don’t blame me that I forgot and don’t grieve me with difficulty.”

74. And they journeyed until they encountered a youth and he [Khidr] killed him. He [Moses] said, “Did you kill a pure soul [who had not slain] another soul? Truly you have done a reprehensible thing.”

75. He [Khidr] said, “Did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me?”

76. He [Moses] said, “If I ask you about anything after this, then don’t keep companionship with me (*tusahibani*). You have received an excuse from me.”

77. So they proceeded until when they came to the people of the village. They sought food from its people, but they refused them hospitality. And they found in it [the village] a wall verging toward (*yuridu*) destruction and he [Khidr] raised it up. He [Moses] said, “If you had wished you could have taken a reward for it.”

#### The Interpretation and Separation

78. He [Khidr] said, “This is the parting between me and you. But I will tell you (*sa'unabi'uka*) the ultimate meaning (*ta'wil*) of what you did not have the patience to bear:

79. “As for the boat, it belonged to poor people who worked on the sea and I wanted (*aradtu*) to make it useless, for there followed them a king who took every boat by force.

80. “As for the youth, his parents were believers (*mu'minain*) and we feared that he would oppress them with rebellion and disbelief.

81. “So we desired (*aradna*) that their Lord would give them one better in purity and closer in mercy (*rahma*).

82. “And as for the wall, it belonged to two youths. They were orphans in the town and under it was a treasure belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man (*salih*). So your Lord desired that they reach their maturity and retrieve their treasure - a mercy (*rahma*) from your Lord. And I did not do it by my own command. That is the ultimate meaning (*ta'wil*) of what you could not bear with patience.”

### *Khidr in Hadith*

How does Khidr figure in the canonical collections of hadith recognized by a consensus of Sunni scholars as sound (*sahih*)? The two “sound” collections of Bukhari and Muslim offer similar, and in some cases, identical elaborations of the narrative. Their transmissions of the narrative of Khidr and Moses reflect contiguous material which has been transmitted in tandem since the second century A.H. / eighth century C.E. -

The hadith provide a larger frame for this narrative with additional background, commentary, and legal implications. Bukhari includes accounts about Khidr in three chapters within his “Book of Knowledge,”<sup>8</sup> one in his “Book of Wages,”<sup>9</sup> and another in his “Book of Stipulations (*shurut*).”<sup>10</sup> In addition to accounts supplied as legal precedents, he offers three accounts in the “Book of Accounts of the Prophets,”<sup>11</sup> and three in the “Book of Qur’an Commentary.”<sup>12</sup>

It is worth noting that Khidr appears relatively early in Bukhari’s editorial sequence. Bukhari discusses Khidr in his 74<sup>th</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> entries among 652 entries spanning nine volumes. In these initial entries, which he includes in the “Book of

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<sup>8</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, Volume I, Book 3, Chapter 17, Number 74; Ch. 20, no. 78; Ch. 45, no. 124.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 36. 7. 467.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* III. 50. 12. 888.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 55. 23. 612-614.

Knowledge,” Bukhari takes the narrative as a precedent for seeking knowledge with diligence and humility. Indeed, in the hadith collection of Bukhari, the first Quranic figure whose story is narrated and explicated is the companion of Moses, Khidr. In fact these hadiths are Bukhari’s first retellings of any Quranic narrative.

In the three hadith accounts collected in the “Book of Knowledge,” Bukhari emphasizes two themes: persevering in the search for knowledge, and recognizing that all knowledge belongs to God. The title of chapter (*bab*) 17, the text of which exclusively comprises a narrative from Ibn ‘Abbas, reads:

What has been said about the journey of Moses (*dhahab Moses*) to the sea and the Statement of God: “[Moses said (to Khidr)], “May I follow you that I may learn of the guidance (*rushd*) which you have learned (18.66)”

The text of chapter 20 of Bukhari’s “Book of Knowledge” follows the wording of chapter 17 very closely. But Bukhari’s title statement here draws a parallel between Moses’s journey to find Khidr and the journey (*rihla*) to collect hadith reports. The title reads:

Going in search of knowledge (*khuruj fi talab al-‘ilm*) and Jabir ibn ‘Abdallah journeyed (*rahala*) for a month to get a single hadith from ‘Abdallah ibn Unais.

The theme of journeying for knowledge is culled from the narrative, but the hadith does not suggest the possibility that such journeying might entail the companionship with, and training under a teacher. For this perspective, we will have to wait for the Sufi

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., VI. 60. 249-251.

*tafsirs*. Bukhari's title to chapter 45 of the "Book of Knowledge" focuses on the need not to credit oneself with the achievement of knowledge:

When a learned scholar (*'alim*) is asked "Who is the most learned (*a'lam*), then he should attribute (*yakilu*) the knowledge to God.<sup>13</sup>

This point of attributing knowledge to Allah is raised in four of Bukhari's narrations: "So Allah admonished him (Moses) for he did not ascribe (*yuraddu*) all knowledge to Allah."<sup>14</sup>

In another legal application derived from the story of Khidr, Muslim also transmits hadith in which the Prophet refers to the example of Khidr's slaying of the youth in order to reinforce his point that during battle, children of the enemy may not be killed. Yazid ibn Hurmuz narrates that Ibn 'Abbas answered the queries of Najda b. 'Amir al-Haruri by saying:

The Messenger of God (S.) used not to kill the children, so you should not kill them unless you could know what Khadir had known about the child he killed<sup>15</sup>

Another exceptional hadith featuring Khidr relates a story of the anti-Christ (*al-Dajjal*). The anti-Christ, unable to enter Medina will be visited by one of the best men of the community, who will tell the anti-Christ that he recognized him. The anti-

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., I.3.45.124.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., I. 3. 45. 124; IV. 55. 23. 613; VI. 60. 249, 250.

<sup>15</sup> Muslim Ibn al-Hajjaj. *Al-Jami' us-Sahih*. (trans. 'Abdul Hamid Siddiqui) (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1973), Chapter 750, sec. 4456-61.

Christ then will ask if the man's opinion would change if he were to kill and restore a human being to life. The virtuous man will say, "No." The anti-Christ then will kill and raise a man back to life. The virtuous caller will still hold his opinion. In a second attempt, the anti-Christ will fail to kill the man again. The subnarrator Abu Ishaq explains: the man will be Khidr.<sup>16</sup>

Nine of Bukhari's eleven accounts begin with the question of the identity of Moses' companion (*Sahib Musa*). Ibn 'Abbas, whose viewpoint prevails in Bukhari and Muslim, reports two disputes over the identities of Khidr and Moses. Ibn 'Abbas, identifies Moses' companion as Khidr; the alternative view of his disputant, al-Hur ibn Qais al-Farazi, is suppressed.<sup>17</sup> In a second instance, Sa'id ibn Jubair narrates that Ibn 'Abbas rejected the doubt raised by one of Sa'id's discussants, Nauf al-Bukali as to whether the Moses of the narrative is the same Moses who led the children of Israel from Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

The full chains of transmitters (*isnads*) for these two accounts are as follows:

(1) 'Amr ibn Muhammad, Ya'qub ibn Ibrahim, Abu Ya'qub ibn Ibrahim, Salih, Ibn Shihab, 'Ubayd Allah ibn 'Abd Allah, Ibn 'Abbas, Ubay ibn Ka'b.<sup>19</sup> (2) Ibn 'Abd

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<sup>16</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, 41. 7017. The narration leaves room for reading either or both the virtuous man and the man who resists death as Khidr.

<sup>17</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 612.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 55. 23. 613.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 55. 23. 612.

Allah, Sufyan, ‘Amr Ibn Dinar, Sa’id ibn Jubayr, Ibn ‘Abbas, Ubay ibn Ka’b.<sup>20</sup> To support his identifications of Khidr and Moses, Ibn ‘Abbas cites testimony from Ubay ibn Ka’b, one of Muhammad’s companions (*sahaba*) otherwise famous for his transmission of commentary based on Jewish sources (*tafsir isra’iliyyat*).<sup>21</sup> In addition Ibn ‘Abbas supplies this frame narrative for the Quranic narrative:

Yes, I heard God’s Messenger saying, “While Moses was sitting in the company of some Israelites, a man came and asked him, ‘Do you know anyone who is more learned than you?’” Moses replied, ‘No.’ So God sent divine inspiration (*wahy*) to Moses, ‘Yes, our slave Khadir.’” Moses asked how to meet him. So the fish was made for him as a sign and he was told that when the fish was lost, he should return and there he would meet him. So Moses went looking for the sign of the fish in the sea. Moses’ servant said to Moses, “Did you see when we came to the rock, I forgot the fish and it was only Satan who made me forget to tell you about it.” Moses said, “That was what we were seeking after.” Both of them returned, following their footsteps and found Khadir. And their other events are what Allah narrates in His Book.<sup>22</sup>

Bukhari next narrates another transmission from Ubay ibn Ka’b providing additional descriptive detail, motifs, and symbols. The fish has been explicitly given as a sign of the place Moses is to reach.<sup>23</sup> In the conversation between Moses and Khidr, Moses identifies himself as the Moses of the Children of Israel.<sup>24</sup> Khidr alludes to two complementary types of knowledge with which he and Moses have each been

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., IV. 55. 23. 613.

<sup>21</sup> s.v. “Ubay b. Ka’b.,” *EI*

<sup>22</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 612. The content is almost identical to the entries which follow (no. 613, 614) and to the entries in Bukhari’s “Book of Knowledge” (Vol. I, Book 3, Chapters 17 [no. 74], 20 [no. 78], 45 [124])

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., I. 3. 74; I. 3. 20. 78; IV. 55. 23. 612.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., I.3. 45. 124; IV. 55. 23. 613; VI. 60. 249, 250, 251.



entrusted.<sup>25</sup> The fish is described as passing through an archway of water made by God.<sup>26</sup> Moses' fatigue occurs at the very moment he passes the place where two seas meet.<sup>27</sup> Khidr is described as a man (*rajul*),<sup>28</sup> suggesting thereby that Khidr is a human being, not an angel or apparition.

The exchange of greetings between Khidr and Moses echoes the question of identity which Ibn 'Abbas tries to resolve. After receiving Moses' greeting, Khidr asks Moses how people greet each other in Moses's land. When Moses responds, "I am Moses" he seems to be avoiding Khidr's request. The avoidance conforms to the pattern Moses will show in his journey with Khidr of being unable to obey his mentor with patience. Whatever rapport may eventually develop between them, it is not evident at this point; nor is a sense of rapport conveyed through their conversation. This exchange about greetings and identity also corresponds to the disputes to which Ibn 'Abbas alludes as he champions the identification of Khidr as the name of Moses's companion and asserts that this Moses is the same Moses whose story is narrated throughout the Qur'an, the Moses of the children of Israel.

The following parallel version also relates the events which led Moses to initiate this journey and identifies the fish as the designated sign for finding Khidr:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., IV. 55. 23. 613; cf. VI. 60. 249.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., VI. 60. 251.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., I. 3. 45. 124.

[Sa'id ibn Jubair narrates from Ibn 'Abbās] "Ubay ibn Ka'b told us that the Prophet said, "Once Moses stood up and addressed the Children of Israel. He was asked who was the most learned man among the people. He said, "I." Allah admonished him as he did not attribute absolute knowledge to Him. So Allah said to him, Yes, I have a servant (*'abd*) at the meeting of the two seas who is more learned than you." Moses said, "O my Lord, how can I meet him?" Allah said, "Take a fish and put it in a large basket and you will find him at the place where you lose the fish."<sup>29</sup>

In the version from the "Book of Knowledge" Ibn 'Abbas narrates that the fish itself is a sign (*aya*): "So Allah made the fish as a sign (*aya*) for him [Moses] and he was told that when the fish was lost, he should return (to the place where he lost it) and there he would meet him [Khidr]."<sup>30</sup>

The identity of the *fata* (young servant) is given as Joshua; the water through which the fish vanishes is described as assuming the shape of an arch; the travelers' fatigue happens exactly when they pass the place where two seas meet.

Moses took a fish and put it in a basket and proceeded along with his servant Joshua ben Nun (Yusha' ibn Nun) till they reached the rock where they laid their heads. Moses slept, and the fish, moving out of the basket, fell into the sea. It took its way into the sea, as in a tunnel. Allah stopped the flow of water over the fish and it became like an arch, in the manner of the example of an arch. They traveled the rest of the night, and the next day, Moses said to his servant, "Give us our food, for indeed we have suffered much fatigue in this journey of ours." Moses did not feel tired till he crossed that place which Allah had ordered him to seek. His servant said to him, "Do you know that when we came to the rock, I forgot the fish, and none but Satan caused me to forget to tell of it; and it took to the water in an amazing way?" So there was a path for the fish and that astonished them. Moses said, "That was what we were seeking." So they went back over their steps till they reached the rock.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., IV. 55. 23. 613.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., I. 3. 74. In an almost postmodern way, it is a sign which signifies by its absence, rather than by its presence.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., IV, 55, 23, 613.

The description which follows of Khidr as one covered in a garment (*musaja' bi-thawb*) supplements the Quranic account. In Sufi hagiographies the motif of this garment reappears as the mantle of initiation (*khirqā*).<sup>32</sup> After they greet, Khidr asks about Moses's greeting, but then announces that each of them, Khidr and Moses possess their own distinctive domain of divine knowledge. It is as if their different forms of greeting symbolize these distinctive modes of knowledge.

And there was a man covered in a garment. Moses offered the greeting of peace (*fa-sallama*) and he replied, "How in your land do you offer greetings of peace? Moses said, 'I am Moses.' He said, 'Moses of the Children of Israel?' He [Moses] said, 'I have come to you that you might teach me what you have learned of guidance (*rushd*). He [al-Khidr] said, 'O Moses, I have some of the knowledge from the knowledge of Allah which Allah has taught me and not taught you; and you have some of the knowledge of the knowledge of Allah which He has taught you and not taught me. Moses asked, 'May I follow you?' He said, 'But you will not be able to bear with me patiently for how can you be patient with what your knowledge cannot comprehend?'"<sup>33</sup>

Khidr tells Moses that each of them possesses a part of God's knowledge. Implicit in this statement is the answer to the question of chronology: Did Moses travel with Khidr before or after he had received the Torah? Khidr's reference to his and Moses' complementary knowledge is suggestive. But more conclusive is this statement attributed Khidr: "Is it not sufficient for you that the Torah is in your hands and the Divine Inspiration comes to you, O Moses."<sup>34</sup> Both statements establish a chronology in which Moses had already received the Torah when he embarked on the journey with

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<sup>32</sup> See Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, pp. 143, 145 (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993); William Chittick, *The Self Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn 'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: S.U.N.Y., 1998), p. 395, n. 20.

<sup>33</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 613.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, VI. 60.250

Khidr. This narrative element frames the interpretation of Moses' authority and station and consequently informs the narrative's assessment of the relationship of prophecy to other modes of knowledge. Moses' engagement with Khidr reflects his incorporation of the Torah; his perspectives on the journey are – at least potentially – informed by his knowledge of Torah.. In this sense, the narrative presents Khidr's God-given knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) and apprehension of true meaning (*ta'wil*) in relationship to Moses' knowledge of Torah as revealed scripture (*tanzil*). From these factors, one might speculate that Moses and Khidr symbolize the relationship between orality and writing in the transmission of knowledge.<sup>35</sup> That Moses received Torah before journeying with Khidr implies a priority of Khidr's knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*, *ta'wil*) as an extension or completion of prophetic knowledge (*nubuwwa*).

The hadith provide other explanatory details supplementing the Quranic narrative. The crew of the boat recognize Khidr and charge no fare (*bi-ghayri nawl*). Then a sparrow appears dipping its beak into the water, an act which Khidr explains to Moses as a measure of their composite knowledge:

Khidr said to Moses, "O Moses, My knowledge and your knowledge have not decreased Allah's knowledge except as much as this sparrow has decreased the water of the sea with its beak."

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<sup>35</sup> On orality and literacy, see Jack Goody, *The Interface between the Oral and the Written. Studies in Literacy, Family, Culture and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Khidr's first statement compared the knowledge of Khidr as complementary to the knowledge of Moses; this second statement now measures both of their "seas" of knowledge as drops compared to God's ocean of knowledge. This incident of the sparrow continues the lesson of the admonition Moses had early received about crediting all knowledge to God.<sup>36</sup> It is also a comparison of the scope of prophetic knowledge compared to all divine knowledge.

In this hadith, as well as in a hadith Bukhari includes in his "Book of Stipulations"<sup>37</sup> (*Kitab al-Shurut*) the Prophet Muhammad highlights a pattern in Moses' answers: Moses moves from giving the excuse of forgetfulness, to then setting up, and finally intentionally imposing upon himself his own condition of separation from Khidr:

Ubay ibn Ka'b narrated: God's Messenger said, "Moses, the Messenger of God," and then he narrated the whole story about him. Khidr said to Moses, "Did I not tell you you would not be able to be patient with me? (18.72) [1] Moses then violated the agreement for the first time because of *forgetfulness*. [2] Then Moses *promised* that if he asked Khidr about anything, the latter [Khidr] would have the *right to desert* him. Moses abided by that condition and on the third occasion [3] he *intentionally asked* Khidr and *caused that condition to be applied*.<sup>38</sup>

Moses' three utterances which bring about his separation from Khidr are as follows: (1) "Rebuke me not for forgetting, or grieve me by raising difficulties in my case." (2) "If I ask you about anything after this, keep me not in your company; you

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., I. 3. 45. 124; IV. 55. 23. 613; VI. 60. 249, 250.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., III. 50. 12. 888.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., III, 50. 12. 888. (Cf. Bukhari I. 3. 124; VI. 60. 249; VI. 60. 251).

have a direct excuse from me.” (3) “If you had wished, you could have taken for this [work] a wage.”

The commentators will further develop this aspect of the story and its implications in (*shar'iah*) concerning the legal limits, stipulations, or conditions of responsibility (*shart/shurut*). Moses' excuse relates to the principle that one not aware of his obligations is not held accountable for their violation. Indeed, in his “Book of Oaths,” Bukhari transmits an account from the Prophet's wife ‘Aisha’ in which Moses's excuse, “Do not blame me for forgetting...” serves as a commentary on the Quranic verse, “God will not call you to account for that which is unintentional in your oaths.”<sup>39</sup>

Bukhari uses Moses statement about the justice of taking wages for rebuilding the wall as a precedent in his “Book of Wages” (*Kitab al-Ijar*). The chapter is titled: “It is permissible to employ someone to repair a wall which is about to collapse.”<sup>40</sup> Compared to Bukhari's contexts for this episode in his other accounts as one of Moses's failure, this application seems ironic. Yet it stresses the two-tiered framework which is at the heart of the narrative of Moses and his companion. In Khidr's words to Moses: “I have some of the knowledge of Allah which he has taught me and which you do not know, while you have some of the knowledge of Allah which he has taught you which I do not know.” While the hadith reports accept the positive value of this

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., VIII. 78. 656; Qur'an 2.225.

<sup>40</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, III. 36. 7. 467.

precedent for the stipulations of oaths and the acceptability of wages, the Sufi commentators will expose the limits of these perspectives and explore a further horizon of virtue.

Most of Bukhari's eleven hadith contribute many additional details, some incidental, some, perhaps, symbolic. The fish was carried in a basket.<sup>41</sup> Some accounts report that Moses was sleeping when the fish slipped away.<sup>42</sup> One account informs us that there was a spring at the rock called "*Al-Hayat*, (the life)" a name which suggests that the fish came alive and swam away.<sup>43</sup> One account relates that Moses found Khidr on a green carpet in the middle of the sea.<sup>44</sup> As we have observed, Khidr questions Moses about not being satisfied with his possession of the Torah.<sup>45</sup> In this same narrative, God does not directly command Moses to find Khidr, but Moses instead initiates the request. Khidr either tore the hole in the boat with his hands<sup>46</sup> or used an adze (*fas*).<sup>47</sup> He plugged the hole with either wood, a bottle, or tar.<sup>48</sup> In his

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., I.3.45.124

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., VI.60.250 & 251

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 6.60.251. This name corresponds to the term Abu Hayyat in the Alexander Romance in which Khidr figures. See below.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., VI.60.250

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., VI. 60. 250

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., I.3.45.124

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., IV.55.23.613; VI. 60. .249.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., VI.60.250

objection to Khidr's breaking the boat Moses emphasizes that they had been charged no fare.<sup>49</sup> The name of the king seizing boats (Hudad ibn Budad) and the name of the boy (Haisur) are recorded.<sup>50</sup> We learn that the slain youth had been playing with other boys when Khidr, using his hands, "plucked off his head as if it were fruit."<sup>51</sup> While some accounts describe the slaying of the youth as like "plucking fruit;" others say Khidr cut his head with a knife.<sup>52</sup> The boy was replaced with a girl.<sup>53</sup> Some hadith describe Khidr as raising the wall by touching it and passing his hands up over it.<sup>54</sup> The descriptions of how Khidr used his fingertips to pluck the boy's head like a piece of fruit and raised the wall by passing his hands are enacted with gestures by the transmitter Sufyan. Similarly, the shape of the tunnel of water through which the fish passed is also described by gestures. Sufyan describes the shape of the tunnel of water by making his arms into the shape of an arch. Ibn Jurayj narrates that another transmitter, 'Amr b. Dinar, demonstrated the shape the water by joining his two thumbs and index fingers together.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., IV. 55. 23. 613; VI. 60. 249, 251.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., VI. 60. 250.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., IV.55.23.613; VI. 60. 249

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., VI. 60. 250, 251.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., VI. 60. 250.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., III.36.7.467; 4. 55. 23. 613.

<sup>55</sup> This same gesture is narrated in another hadith to refer to the opening in the wall which will be made by Gog and Magog (*Juj wa Majuj*), an element in the story of Alexander the Great (*Dhu'l-Qarnayn*) which follows the story of Khidr and Moses in the same eighteenth chapter, the Sura of the Cave. We will discuss this below.



Moses' objection to Khidr's repairing the wall as one of Khidr's entitlement to wages, stresses the discrepancy between the rejection by the people of the village and Khidr's generosity. A contrast is also established between the fare (*nawl*) which the ferrymen waive and the wage (*ajr*) Moses would claim as Khidr's entitlement. The implication of Moses' interest in the wage as money that might have been used to get food will be explored by the Sufi commentators.<sup>56</sup> As we mentioned earlier, a number of hadith examine Moses' role in bringing the separation upon himself.<sup>57</sup> In the case of Moses protest over wages, his objection contradicts not only Khidr's generosity but also the ferrymen's waiving of the fare for passage. Moses appears keenly aware of their generosity when he protests Khidr's scuttling of the boat.<sup>58</sup>

It is in hadith that we discover why the Qur'an's elect servant earned the nickname (*laqab*) of Khidr, the "Green." It is narrated that when he would sit on barren land it would turn verdant green.<sup>59</sup>

Abu Huraira narrated: "Al-Khadir was so named because when he sat over a barren white land, it would turn green with vegetation."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., III.36.7.467; VI. 60. 250

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., I.3.124; III. 50. 12. 888; VI.60.249; VI.60.251.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., IV. 55. 23. 613; VI. 60. 249, 251.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., IV. 55. 23. 614. The *mufassir* Ibn al-'Arabi al-Ishbili relates his full name as Abu al-'Abbas Balya ibn Malkan al-Khidr.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., IV. 55, 23, 614.

What connotations does this nickname al-Khidr, “the Green” evoke? As we have previously observed, green is the emblematic color of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad often wore green; the dome of the Prophet’s mosque is green; paradise, which is an eternal garden, is symbolically green. The people of paradise wear green robes<sup>61</sup> and recline on green couches.<sup>62</sup> At times the Ka’aba’s silk covering (*kiswah*) has been green.<sup>63</sup> The nickname Khidr, “the Green,” connotes a relationship between the companion and mentor of Moses and the Prophet Muhammad, paradise, and Muslim piety.

### ***Muhammad’s Evaluation of Moses’ Quest***

How did the Prophet Muhammad interpret Moses’ companionship (*suhba*) with Khidr? One of the most noteworthy features of this hadith is the Prophet Muhammad’s summary evaluation of Moses’ performance:

(1) “We would have wished that Moses had been patient; then Allah would have narrated more of their story.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Qur’an Surat al-Kahf (18. 31); Sura Insan (76. 21).

<sup>62</sup> Qur’an Sura ar-Rahman (55. 76 )

<sup>63</sup> Abu’l-Husayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr (540/1145-614/1217), “A Description of the Sacred Mosque and the Ancient House,” from *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr* (trans.: R.J.C. Broadhurst) excerpted in Ilse Lichtenstadter, ed., *Introduction to Classical Arabic Literature*. New York: Schocken Books, 1976, pp. 376-392. See 377, 384.

<sup>64</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, I.3.124; VI. 60. .249; VI. 60. 251.

(2) “May Allah bless Moses with Mercy; had he been patient we would have been told more about their case.”<sup>65</sup>

This final judgment by Muhammad lauds Khidr’s knowledge at the same time that it underscores Moses’ lack of patience. On both accounts the Prophetic dictum opens a way for reflection on the meaning of Khidr’s role. As we have discussed, in a related interpretation, the Prophet also distinguished Moses’ role in bringing the journey to a close: “He [Moses] asked Khidr and caused the condition [of Moses’ excuse] to be applied.”<sup>66</sup>

Throughout this work we will see how the narrative’s motifs, events, and exegetical nuances are interpreted. In the following synopsis of the accounts in Qur’an and Hadith, I have divided the narrative into sections and given each section a title to highlight the thematic developments and accents on Khidr’s role which the Hadith contribute.

The Quest for the Meeting of the Two Seas becomes a Quest for Khidr as one who is wiser than Moses.

Once when Moses and the Children of Israel were gathered and Moses preached to them, a man stood up afterwards and asked Moses if anyone in the world was more learned than he.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> This same *hadith* is recorded in Muslim, *Al-Jami’* Chapter 992, sec. 5864. I have modified the translation at times for style.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 405.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 55. 23. 612.

When Moses said, “No.” Allah told Moses that there exists one of His precious servants to whom He has given deeply of His Mercy and Compassion (*rahma min ‘indana* and of inner Knowledge and Wisdom ( *‘allamanahu min ladunna [‘ilm ladunni ]* ).<sup>68</sup>

Allah admonished Moses for not attributing all knowledge to him<sup>69</sup> and inspired (*awha* ) Moses to look for “our servant Khadir”,<sup>70</sup> at the place where the two seas meet (*majma’ al-bahrain*) and to bring along in a basket a fish. Allah explained the sign by which Moses will know he has reached the place where the two seas meet: he will lose and forget the fish.<sup>71</sup>

In the opening of the narrative in the Qur’an, Moses resolved to journey on a quest<sup>72</sup> to find this precious servant of Allah so as to learn of his gifts of wisdom (*‘ilm ladunni* ), compassion (*rahma min ‘indina* ), and guidance (*rushd* ) from Allah.<sup>73</sup>

As Moses journeyed along the seashore, he proclaimed to his disciple Joshua his intention not to cease searching until finding the place where the two seas meet, even if it takes ages.<sup>74</sup> They continued on their journey, until they grew weary. As they rested on a rock, their fish slipped out of the basket, slid off the rock, touched the water, sprang to life, and swam away as if plunging through a tunnel. Allah stopped the flow of the water and it became an arch. When Muhammad, described this, he drew an arch with his hands.<sup>75</sup> But even though Joshua had witnessed the fish tunneling through the arch of standing water, he forgot to tell Moses.

They traveled through the night. Joshua said nothing until the next day when Moses suggested they eat their meal. Then Joshua informed Moses that the fish got away and that Satan made him forget to disclose that when the fish slipped off the rock and touched the water it sprang to life and took off miraculously. Identifying this miracle of the fish and their forgetfulness of it as the sign of the place where the two seas meet – the place to which Allah had sent him – Moses commanded that they retrace their steps to this place where they had lost and forgot their fish.

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<sup>68</sup> Qur’an Surat al-Kahf (18.65).

<sup>69</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, I. 3. 45. 124.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 55. 23. 612, p. 401.

<sup>71</sup> Qur’an Surat al-Kahf (18.61). *Sahih Bukhari* I. 3. 17. 74; I. 3. 20. 78; I. 3. 45. 124; III. 36. 7. 467; III. 50. 12. 888; IV. 55. 23.612, 613, 614; VI. 60. 249, 250, 251. Once the Prophet Muhammad explained to his companions that this special servant of Allah was named Khidr, “the Green One,” because whenever he would sit on barren land, the ground would turn green by the time he stood up. (*Sahih al-Bukhari* vol 4, ch. 23, 614).

<sup>72</sup> Qur’an Sura Kahf (18.60).

<sup>73</sup> Qur’an 18.65-66.

<sup>74</sup> Qur’an 18.60.

<sup>75</sup> *Sahih Bukhari* IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 402-3.

Through the meeting with Khidr and their contract comes Khidr's self-disclosure and the complementarity between their two bodies of knowledge.

So they retraced their steps until they came to the rock at the place where the two seas meet. And they found there one of God's servants, one God had selected to directly receive His merciful compassion and inner knowledge (18.64-65), Khidr, the Green One. When Moses approached him he was lying covered with a garment.<sup>76</sup> Moses greeted him and he asked, "How do people greet each other in your land?"<sup>77</sup> Moses said, "I am Moses." Al-Khadir asked, "Moses of the Children of Israel?" Moses asked, "May I follow you that you may teach me spiritual growth and give me some of the guidance you have been taught."<sup>78</sup>

Al-Khadir replied, "But, truly, you will not be able to be patient with me. And how can you be patient when you will be faced with what is beyond what you can understand?"<sup>79</sup>

Al-Khadir said, "O Moses, I have some of the knowledge of Allah which he has given me which you do not know, and you also have some of the knowledge of Allah which he has given you which I do not know."<sup>80</sup>

Moses expressed his determination to fulfill his mission and follow Khidr: "You will find me patient, God Willing, and I will not disobey your commands."<sup>81</sup> Al-Khadir finally agreed, but set one condition: "If you wish to follow me, you must not ask anything until I mention it to you first."<sup>82</sup>

The journey of the companions begins with a lesson in the infinity of God's knowledge and Khidr's demonstration of selfless action.

So they traveled on along the seashore until they met the crew of a boat who recognized Khidr and let him and Moses ride for free.<sup>83</sup> Then a sparrow came and sat on the edge of the boat and dipped its beak into the sea. Al-Khadir said to Moses, "My knowledge and your knowledge, compared to the knowledge of Allah is like what this sparrow has removed from the sea."<sup>84</sup> As they were riding

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 403.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., IV, 55. 23, 613, p. 402.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., IV, 55. 23, 613, p. 403.

<sup>79</sup> Qur'an 18.68.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 403.

<sup>81</sup> Qur'an 18.69. *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 403-4.

<sup>82</sup> Qur'an 18.70.

<sup>83</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 404.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., IV. 23. 613, p. 404.

Khidr took out a woodworking tool, broke the boat, and plugged the holes. Moses protested and asked, "Are you breaking this boat to drown its people? You have done a strange thing!"<sup>85</sup>

Al-Khadir answered, "Did I not tell you that you would not be able to find enough patience to bear with me?"<sup>86</sup>

Moses said, "Please do not blame me for forgetting, or for causing difficulties."<sup>87</sup> The Prophet Muhammad underscored the fact that the first excuse given by Moses was that he had forgotten.<sup>88</sup>

They continued further until they came upon a young boy playing among other boys. Al-Khadir stepped forward and, as if plucking a piece of fruit, killed him by pulling his head off. And Moses challenged, "Have you killed a pure soul who has not killed anyone? You have done a terrible thing."<sup>89</sup>

Al-Khadir then reminded Moses, "Didn't I tell you that you could not patiently bear with me?" And Moses said, "If I ask you about anything after this don't keep company with me. Now you have my excuse." In this way Moses indicated that when and if he protested again, he would understand and accept Khidr's decision to part ways with him.<sup>90</sup>

Next they journeyed until they came to the people of a village. They asked for food and drink, but the people of the village refused to grant these favors. Al-Khadir then found in the village a wall which was on the verge of falling down. So Khidr passed his hand upward over the wall and it straightened back up. Moses protested, observing that these people had denied them food and refused them as guests and yet, Khidr had chosen to rebuild their wall, even though, had he desired, he could have taken a reward for this service. Moses was thinking that they could use the wages for food. But Khidr was not acting for the sake of his own reward.<sup>91</sup>

### The interpretation and separation concludes with the Prophet's reprimand of Moses and commendation of Khidr.

At this point Khidr announced to Moses, "This is the parting between me and you. However, I will reveal to you the real meaning (*ta'wil*) of what you were not able to bear with patience."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Qur'an 18.71. *Sahih Bukhari*, IV, 23, 613, p. 404.

<sup>86</sup> Qur'an 18.72.

<sup>87</sup> Qur'an 18.73.

<sup>88</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, IV 55. 23, 613, p. 404.

<sup>89</sup> Qur'an 18.74. *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 404-5.

<sup>90</sup> Qur'an 18.76. *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 405.

<sup>91</sup> Qur'an 18.77. *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 405.

<sup>92</sup> Qur'an 18.78. *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 405.

The Prophet added, “We wish that Moses could have remained patient by virtue of which Allah might have told us more about their story.”<sup>93</sup>

Al-Khadir then began to show Moses the ultimate meaning (*ta'wil*) surrounding the events which Moses had not understood: “As for the boat, it belonged to poor people (*masakin*) who worked on the sea and I wanted to make it useless because coming from behind was a king seizing every boat by force.”<sup>94</sup>

Al-Khadir explained that in the case of the youth, his parents were believers (*mu'minayn*)<sup>95</sup> and that Allah and Khidr together feared that the child would cause them grief by his stubborn rebellion, disbelief, and ingratitude. In fact he was likely to corrupt his parents, who, in their love for him, might have been lured into a life of evil. So their Lord and Khidr desired to give them in exchange a child better in purity and closer in Mercy.<sup>96</sup>

Finally Khidr explained that the wall belonged to two young orphans in the town. Beneath their wall lay a treasure left for the two orphans by their father, a righteous person of virtue (*Abuhuma Salih*).<sup>97</sup> Al-Khadir told Moses, “Your Lord desired that these young orphans should reach their strength and maturity so that they might bring out their treasure — a treasure of Mercy from their Lord. And I did not do these acts on my own authority. This is the real meaning (*ta'wil*) of what you could not bear with patience.”<sup>98</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad commented that by protesting the third time, Moses, by volunteering his consent that Khidr might leave him if he broke his promise not to challenge Khidr's actions, signaled or triggered Khidr's departure. As the Prophet Muhammad said, “We wished that Moses could have been more patient so that Allah could have described to us more about their story.” The first time Moses spoke up, he gave forgetfulness as his excuse. The Prophet once said of this third act of speaking out by Moses, “He intentionally asked Khidr and caused the condition [of Moses's excuse] to be applied.”<sup>99</sup>

Even in advance of the classical and Sufi commentators, these *hadith* reports already present the idea that Khidr is invested with a knowledge beyond that of

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<sup>93</sup> Idem, IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 405.

<sup>94</sup> Qur'an Sura al-Kahf (18.79).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 18. 80.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 18.80-81.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., ibid., 18.82

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., ibid., 18.82.

<sup>99</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 613, p. 405.

Moses. The Qur'an as well alludes to this special inner knowledge through the motifs of seeking guidance (*rushd*) and Khidr's question to Moses concerning Moses's ability to understand what his knowledge does not encompass. But the hadith reports underscore how vast is that knowledge without articulating how it might be learned. For that development we must look to the Sufi commentaries.

But first we should evaluate two questions in a broader perspective. What makes Khidr important? Second, how has this story been studied up to now?

### ***Retracing the Steps: Khidr's Ubiquity and Diversity***

What value and currency have Khidr and his story actually achieved? We have seen how Khidr emerges as a figure of importance in Qur'an and Hadith. Sufi hagiographies predictably narrate numerous encounters with this immortal esoteric initiatory guide. He receives widespread mention, if not always extensive interpretation.<sup>100</sup> The term for the knowledge he imparts to Moses is the same term

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<sup>100</sup> Among insightful, if brief, treatments of the subject of Khidr/al-Khidr in general works may be included: Marshall Hodgson, *Venture of Islam* Vol. II. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 460-1; Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 236-7. Noteworthy longer treatments appear in Brandon Wheeler, "The Jewish Origins of Qur'an 18:65-82? Reexamining Arent Jan Wensinck's Theory" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118.2 (1998), 153-171 and *ibid.*, "Moses or Alexander? Early Islamic Exegesis of Qur'an 18. 60-65," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 57, no. 3, (July 1998), 191-215; James Jervis, *Al-Khadir: Origins and Interpretations. A Phenomenological Study*. (Unpublished MA Thesis. McGill University, Toronto, Canada, 1993) and Norman O. Brown, "The Apocalypse of Islam," in *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991): 69-94. The generic figure of the Green Man receives increasing cross-cultural attention in this ecologically-attuned age, partly due to the pagan figure of the Green Man, whose relationship to that of the Islamic Green Man Khidr is interesting, if speculative; some, though not all, of the grounds for this connection appear below in the discussion of Levantine "Georgic Saints." General treatments of the Green Man include: William Anderson, *Green Man: the Archetype of Our Oneness with the Earth*. (London and San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990);



used to describe Joseph’s skill at dream interpretation (*ta’wil*).<sup>101</sup> It is also the term at the center of discussions of exegetical authority raised in a verse of Sura Al-Imran (3.7). That discussion reflects on the question of whether any or some gifted human interpreters might have access to the Qur’an’s “true meaning” (*ta’wil*): Does access to the “true meaning” belong to God alone or is it shared along with certain people, those “firmly rooted [in knowledge]” (*rasikhun*) who are “possessors of the inner heart” (*ulu’ al-albab*)?<sup>102</sup> The majority view is that God alone knows its true meaning (*ta’wil*). This view is reflected by punctuating the text with a stop (*waqfa lazim*) – equivalent to a period so that it reads:

But no one knows its [the Qur’an’s] true meaning (*ta’wil*) except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: “We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord” and none will grasp the message but men of understanding.

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Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 313-4, 318. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 196. Hildegard of Bingen’s representation of Christ as “Greenness Incarnate” and as the “Green Man” appear respectively in Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1985, pp. 30-32) and idem., *The Reinvention of Work* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 306. This is literally illustrated in Hildegard’s drawing reproduced in Carl Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (Princeton: Bollingen, rev. ed., 1968), 364, pl. 195. For a slightly similar European legend of a green initiatory figure associated with rejuvenation (if not immortality) and whose tests challenge the patience and ethical notions of his apprentice, see *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

<sup>101</sup> Sura Yusuf (12.6, 21, 44, 100, 101).

<sup>102</sup> Carl Ernst, *Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 37-38. Mahmud Ayoub, *The Qur’an and Its Interpreters* vol 2. (Albany: S.U.N.Y., 1992), 39-46. A discussion of the issues underlying Sura Al Imran 3.7 is the subject of Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir,” in Andrew Rippin, ed. *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’an* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 47-62.; see in particular pp. 51-54 and 58-62.

The minority of commentators, of whom the most famous and authoritative exponent is Mujahid,<sup>103</sup> run the sentences together to assert that both God and these gifted human interpreters share in the authority to arrive at the text's true meaning (*ta'wil*):

But no one knows its [the Qur'an's] true meaning (*ta'wil*) except Allah and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. They say "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord" and none will grasp the message but men of understanding.

In essence, this term for interpretation (*ta'wil*) which Khidr uses twice to describe what he teaches to Moses, also connotes the Prophet Joseph's skill at dream interpretation, as well as a key term in the discussion of interpretive authority in Quranic exegesis. *Ta'wil* is an exegetical term from the root *a-w-l*, meaning origins, beginnings, and firsts. As an exegetical term, *ta'wil* means understanding the origins or source of meaning. It is a "hermeneutic of origins." The exegetes' answer in the Quranic passage underscores the thrust of *ta'wil* as a return to origins. They profess belief as the basis of engagement with the Book and affirm its source to be God. Their exegetical principles trace the origins of interpretation in belief and authorship in God.

Khidr's significance is also further measurable in terms of Khidr's relation to Moses and Moses's relation to Muhammad: as we observed earlier, other than Muhammad, no other figure in the Qur'an except Khidr exhibits either such pre-eminence or authority over Moses.

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<sup>103</sup> Abu'l-Hajjaj Mujahid b. Jabir al-Makki (21/642-104/722), a pupil of Ibn 'Abbas frequently cited by al-Tabari.

As we have discussed before, Khidr's significance is reflected in his adoption by two European esotericists: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Carl Jung. Possibly the earliest European reference to Khidr appears in Goethe's *West-osterlicher Divan*.<sup>104</sup> As we have also seen in the previous chapter, Carl Jung presents a hermetic interpretation of the story of Khidr as an allegory of initiatic rebirth into the higher consciousness within the self.<sup>105</sup>

Between quests for origins and quests for ends, the question therefore arises: How do we approach this material in a way which traces it in an Islamic framework?

### ***The Quest for Origins: Ends as Forms Rather Than Functions***

How much value should we attach to theories and insights about the genealogy of the figure of Khidr, his precedents, and similarities to other figures and narratives, previous and contemporary? Even though some of the following theories may contribute to an enriched appreciation of Khidr, they do not address the Islamicate significances of the

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<sup>104</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Reineke Fox, West-Eastern Divan, and Achilleid*, trans. By Alexander Rogers (London: George Bell and Sons, 1890), 199-200.

<sup>105</sup> Carl G. Jung, "A Typical Set of Symbols Illustrating the Process of Transformation," *Collected Works* Vol. 9, pt. 1. (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1959, 1969). On the role of the "magical traveling companion" as the water of life which nurtures the construction of self (i.e., Khidr [and Moses], Krishna [and Arjuna], and Jesus [and the disciples on the road to Emmaus]), see Jung's, "Dream Symbols of the Individuation Process," in *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*. Bollingen Series xxx.4 New York: Pantheon Books, 1960, 375-6. Jung refers to Khidr as "the archetype of the self" and [in a striking formulation] "the human personification of Allah," in *Flying Saucers: a Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*. (New York: New American Library, 1959, p. 32), cf. p. 111. For biographical background on Jung's interest in Khidr, see Nicholas Battye, "Khidr in the Opus of Jung: the Teaching of Surrender," in *Jung and the Monotheisms*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994.).

role of Khidr and the narrative in which he figures.

Let us review this approach. A number of scholars have cited similarities of feast days and figurative symbolism to link the figure of Khidr with what H.S. Haddad has colorfully termed “Georgic” figures, including in addition to George and Elijah, Baal-Zeus, Baal-Saphon, and Baal-Hadad.<sup>106</sup> If so, why would such a figure become the protagonist of a narrative which focuses on themes *not* particularly related to agricultural cultic ritual, but directly bearing on issues of institutional and textual practice? The story of Khidr focuses on three such themes: (1) spiritual guidance, (2) inner interpretation, and (3) justice and the limits of human interpretation to comprehend the complete context (*ta’wil* [inner hermeneutic]) of any situation. The key to the story of Khidr, in our analysis, implied in the exegetical works of the commentators (*mufasssirun*), appears in the socio-historical question of the role of the spiritual guide (*murshid*). Whatever similarities to past precedents may root the figure of Khidr in an agricultural symbolism and cult, we propose turning to Islamic discussions of Khidr as a paradigm of prophecy and spiritual guidance.

But this comparative legacy is deeply rooted. Western scholars have often emphasized the parallels between the narrative of Khidr and three allegedly earlier stories from other traditions: the epic of Gilgamesh, the Alexander romance, and the

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<sup>106</sup> H.S. Haddad, “ ‘Georgic’ Cults and Saints of the Levant.” *Numen* 16 (1969): 28-29; 35-36. An even more close resemblance among Baals would be that of the Libo-Phoenician Baal Hamon, an oracle of the god of the sea, sought out by Alexander the Great (with whom Khidr is often associated). Baal Hamon is discussed in Oric Bates, *Eastern Lybians* (London: Macmillan, 1914) I am grateful to Vincent Cornell for this reference.

story of Elijah and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi.<sup>107</sup> The epic of Gilgamesh features a character named Utnapishtim, also known as Khasisatra (with the phonetic similarity between this name and that of Khidr being implied) who lives at *ina pi narati*, the mouth of the rivers (allegedly correlate to the *majma' al-bahrain*, the meeting of the two seas) and was given eternal life. In the Alexander Romance of Pseudo-Callisthanes, Alexander's cook, Andreas (alleged to be the Greek precedent of the Arabic name Idris)<sup>108</sup> washes a salted fish in the spring of the water of life and the fish comes to life and swims.<sup>109</sup>

In addition to the Alexander Romance, a story of Elijah presents interesting parallels. In an 11<sup>th</sup> century Jewish story written by Nissim ben Jacob ibn Shahin of Kairouan, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (220-250 C.E.) is guided by Elijah on a journey, in a narrative structure parallel to that of the Quranic narrative, during which Elijah performs three baffling and outrageous acts similar to those performed by Khidr.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> s.v. "Khidr" in *EI*. James Jervis's dissertation, *ibid.*, is devoted to fulfilling this project of source-criticism and comparative analysis of origins. On the question of chronological precedence, the first two of these stories (Gilgamesh and Alexander) are indisputably earlier; the claim that the story of Elijah and Yehoshua ben Levi is earlier than the Qur'an will be critiqued.

<sup>108</sup> s.v. "Idris," in *EI*.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Stoneman, trans. *The Greek Alexander Romance*. London: Penguin, 1991, pp. 121-124.

<sup>110</sup> Nissim ben Jacob ibn Shahin (990-1062 C.E.) *An Elegant Composition concerning Relief after Adversity*. (Translation of *Hibbur Yafeh me-hay-Yeshu'ah* by William M. Brinner.) (New Haven: Yale, 1977.) The motifs of this version are as follows: (1) a family hosts the two travelers; in the morning Elijah causes their cow to die; (2) a wealthy man offers no hospitality and Elijah rebuilds his wall; (3) when at a rich synagogue they are offered only bread and salt, Elijah wishes that they should be given many chiefs; (4) when a poor community hosts them, Elijah asks God that they only be given one chief. Here are the interpretations: (1) the cow was substituted for the wife slated to die; (2) under

Although some Orientalists have attempted to assert that this is an oral tale older than the Quranic version, no evidence for this claim exists and a number of issues undermine this assertion. First, the authorship follows the Qur'an by 400 years. Secondly, as Brinner shows, the genre of this work follows that of the *Kitab al-Faraj* of al-Tanukhi and other such works. Finally, despite Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's dates (220-250 C.E.), no earlier version of this story exists in Jewish literature.<sup>111</sup> Some would add to Alexander and Elijah the names of Osiris and Melchizedek. In a parallel quest for origins, Ilse Lichtenstader has argued that the figure of Khidr was adapted from that of Osiris.<sup>112</sup> Qur'an translator Yusuf 'Ali compared Khidr to Melchizedek, "King of Salem and Priest of God Most High." (Gen. 14:18-20)<sup>113</sup>

Such comparisons offer little value on their own terms, since they can only posit alleged genealogical similarity but cannot prove any historical transmission or influence. They may, however, provide new perspectives, interpretive agendas, and

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the wall was a treasure the stingy man, because of his stinginess, did not deserve; (3) a place with many chiefs is bound to be ruined; (4) those under one chief can prosper. The moral of this story is given as follows: If the wicked prosper it is to their disadvantage; when a righteous person is distressed or tried s/he is being delivered from a worse ordeal.

<sup>111</sup> This question of the comparative dating of the two narratives is further explored by Brannon Wheeler, "The Jewish Origins of Qur'an 18:65-82? Reexamining Arent Jan Wensinck's Theory" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (118.2).

<sup>112</sup> Ilse Lichtenstader, "Origin and Interpretation of Some Koranic Symbols," *Arabic and Islamic in Honor H.A.R. Gibb*. George Makdisi, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 426-436. This article extracts significance from every similarity between narratives of Osiris and the narrative of Khidr. Al-Khadir's wall is correlated to Osiris' building of cities. Osiris' phallus swallowed by a fish is tied to Musa's fish which leads him to Khidr. *Kharq al-Safina* (the breaking of the boat) is linked to the possibility of obliterating the ferry boat of death.

<sup>113</sup> 'Abdallah Yusuf 'Ali, trans. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, new revised ed. (Brentwood, MA: Amana, 1991), 727, fn 2411.

helpful models for identifying and focusing attention on unnoticed features within the story. But all such comparisons demonstrate an interesting disregard for the Islamicate significance and provenance of this narrative and its application in Islamic settings. How do Muslims in general, and Sufis especially, understand and apply this narrative in historically discernible ways?

Into this comparativist's fray, a new voice enters. Brannon Wheeler<sup>114</sup> posits that the commentators used allusions to the motifs and materials of the Alexander Romance and Gilgamesh Epic not as a form of source criticism, but rather, as a strategy for positioning the authority of the commentators' expertise and advancing an intertextuality that informs and exalts the status of the Prophet Muhammad. Wheeler suggests that the commentators chose motifs and associations which linked the story of Khidr in a number of authoritative directions: connections with other Moses stories, connections to Alexander and Moses as "Prophet Kings" heralding these dimensions of the prophethood of Muhammad, connections to the motifs of Gilgamesh and Alexander to link this story to well-known motifs or stories, and connections to Elijah to allow Khidr to emerge as a distinctively Islamicate counterpart to Elijah.<sup>115</sup> Wheeler re-examines and proposes corrections of the dating of some of the alleged "sources" of

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<sup>114</sup> Brannon Wheeler, "The Jewish Origins of Qur'an 18:65-82? Reexamining Arent Jan Wensinck's Theory" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118.2 (1998): 153-171, and *ibid.*, "Moses or Alexander? Early Islamic Exegesis of Qur'an 18. 60-65," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 57, no. 3, (July 1998): 191-215.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, "Jewish Origins," p. 165.

the Khidr story and argues that some versions of the Alexander Romance, as well as the story of Elijah and Joshua b. Levi, are informed by, rather than derived from, the Islamic commentaries.<sup>116</sup> However, in this otherwise thoroughly documented body of work, citations for the sources of two of the connections remain unclear. First, which commentaries allege connections between Gilgamesh and the story of Khidr? All that can be said at this point is that motifs found and interpreted by the *tafsirs* are shared by the story of Gilgamesh. The second question: Which commentaries identify connections between the Khidr story and Moses' journey to, and training under, his father-in-law Shu'ayb/Jethro (Qur'an 28: 24)? Aside from the question of voice, this parallel itself is suggestive enough to invite us to ask why Islamic sources have not even hinted at an identity or relationship between Khidr and Shu'ayb/Jethro. In the commentaries, the stories of Khidr and Alexander have been linked by key motifs: the fish reborn in the Water of Eternal Life and the notion that both Khidr's meeting of the two seas and Alexander's places of the setting and rising sun similarly signify the extremes of East and West leading to the Garden of Eden. The commentators' interpretations may, as Wheeler suggests, show us not the sources, but rather, the intertextual strategies of the commentators who use a "homiletic or midrashic style to teach readers."<sup>117</sup> As important as new interpretations of the intertextual relationship among diverse narratives may be, we must return to the basic question for Sufi

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, "Moses or Alexander?," 193-203.

<sup>117</sup> Idem, 212-213, 215.



exegetes: How is the narrative of Khidr applied in the framing of the relationship between Sufi teacher and student. How does the story of Moses and Khidr inform aspects of Islamic life which it models and parallels, namely the relationship between *murshid* and *murid*?

Now that we have sketched out the broad outlines of his persona, we will save our consideration of how Khidr figures in hagiographies until after we complete our analysis of the construction of successive interpretive frameworks among Qur'an, Hadith, and Tafsir. What will be needed is to consider the case of the treatment of story of Khidr and Moses in the classic encyclopedic *tafsir* of at-Tabari.

*Foundations of Tafsir Traditions:*

*Interpretations of Moses' Journey with Khidr in the Traditional Tafsir of Al-Tabari*

In the exegetical line that begins with Qur'an and hadith and leads to Sufi tafsirs, the foundation for Quranic hermeneutics is established in the classical tradition of received tafsir (*tafsir ma'thur*). Traditions of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir/tafassir*) were passed down and received within an interdisciplinary scope broader than the legal and ethical concerns which guided the recension of hadith. Hadith collections were arranged and applied to legal norms; tafsirs to exegesis. Of course, in a broad sense, hadith provide Qur'anic commentary by detailing Muhammad's life as a model (*sunna*) of the Qur'an's values and import; in a more direct sense, the hadith collections also contain

discrete verbal explanations of select passages of the Qur'an.<sup>118</sup> Tafsirs provide a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the meanings of passages in the Qur'an on a number of levels. Commentators, especially the classical commentators, unfold significances and applications of the Qur'an by integrating knowledge from a vast variety of Islamic disciplines or fields of knowledge including: hadith, recitation (*qira'a*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), theology (*kalam*), grammar (*nahwa*), and rhetoric (*balagha*).

As Norman Calder has observed, tafsirs as a genre are constituted of instrumental and ideological structures.<sup>119</sup> Tafsir's instrumental structures consist of linguistic and literary features: "orthography, lexis, syntax, rhetoric, symbol, allegory;" ideological structures refer to scholastic disciplines: "prophetic history, theology, eschatology, law, *tasawwuf*."<sup>120</sup> Calder describes the formal structural characteristics of *tafsir* as containing three elements: (1) Qur'anic segments followed by commentary; (2) citation of named authorities; and (3) polyvalent readings. Tafsir then is an exegetical activity developed in an interactive matrix of various disciplines and involving an interplay between received tradition and new interpretation within a

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<sup>118</sup> The role of hadith in tafsir and its relationship to tafsir is examined by R. Marston Speight, "The Function of *hadith* as Seen in the Six Authoritative Collections," in *Approaches to the history of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 63-81.

<sup>119</sup> Norman Calder, "*Tafsir* from Tabari to Ibn Kathir," in G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, *Approaches to the Qur'an*. (London: Routledge, 1993), 101-140.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-106.

lineage of Quranic commentators (*mufasssirun*). These characteristics describe the classical tafsir tradition which culminates in the work of Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (224/839-310/923), *Jami' al-bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'an* (*The Gathering of the Elucidation of the Verses of the Qur'an*).<sup>121</sup>

In this section we will introduce the history of the classical tafsir tradition of commentary based on received reports (*tafsir bi 'l-ma'thur*), and then examine al-Tabari's treatment of the story of Moses and Khidr (Qur'an 18.60-82).<sup>122</sup> The discussion in this chapter applies directly to the *tafsir* of al-Tabari, while also providing a context for understanding the nature of the Sufi tafsirs which we shall examine in the next two chapters.

As we will discuss in chapter four, Sufi tafsirs both conform to and diverge from the model which Calder outlines for classical tafsir. Like their classical counterparts, Sufi tafsirs cite hadith, though less frequently. Also like their classical counterparts Sufi tafsirs cite named authorities; however, in Sufi tafsirs the named authorities are more typically earlier Sufis. The main hermeneutical thrust of Sufi tafsirs comes from literary allusions, which Gerhard Bowering describes as "the result of the merger between Qur'anic keynotes and the matrix of the Sufi world of ideas."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (224/5-310 / 839-923), *Jami' al-bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'an* (30 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Alamin, 1992).

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 15, pp. 244-259, continuing in vol. 16, pp. 260-273.

<sup>123</sup> Gerhard Bowering, "The Qur'an Commentary of al-Sulami." In *Islamic Studies Presented*

Although Sufi commentators engage in a hermenetic of inner meaning (*batin*), their readings assume and use the explicit level of meaning (*zahir*) as their foundation.

The oldest tafsir traditions date to the generation of the Prophet's companions. The allegedly earliest *mufassir* was the Prophet's companion and cousin 'Abd Allah 'ibn 'Abbas (d. circa 688). Ibn 'Abbas was honored with such titles as the "ocean of Qur'anic knowledge;" the "Doctor (*habr*) of the community; and he was popularly known as "the interpreter of the Qur'an (*tarjuman al-Qur'an*)."<sup>124</sup> Ibn 'Abbas also served as the governor of Basra. One of 'Ali's sons, Muhammad b. al-Hanafiyya, who led his funeral said of him, "By Allah, today the master (*rabbani*) of this community has died."<sup>125</sup> The Prophet is reported to have prayed for the flowering of his exegetical acumen: "God, instruct him in the religion and teach him the interpretation."<sup>126</sup> According to tradition, Ibn 'Abbas received direct instruction from the Prophet in Qur'anic exegesis. Apparently Ibn 'Abbas also collected reports from Jewish converts

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to Charles J. Adams. eds. Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), p. 51.

<sup>124</sup> Fred Leemhuis argues that this designation means that Ibn 'Abbas was, among others, an eminent interpreter, not as is often thought that he was the exclusive superlative *mufassir*. Leemhuis bases this re-evaluation based on al-Tabari's wording in his preface which reads: "What an excellent Qur'an interpreter Ibn 'Abbas is!" (*Ni'ma tarjuman al-Qur'an Ibn 'Abbas*.) Leemhuis argues that this formulation implies that Ibn 'Abbas is one among other qualified interpreters. See idem, "Origins and Early Development of the *tafsir* Tradition," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Quran*, ed. Andrew Rippin. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 13-30.

<sup>125</sup> John Cooper, "Introduction," *The Commentary on the Qur'an*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), xvi.

<sup>126</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Ihya 'ulum ad-din* (Istanbul, 1318-1322 A.H./1900-4 C.E.), I, 268ff., quoted in Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*. Ed. and trans., Alford T. Welch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 230. Al-Ghazali cites this oft-quoted report as evidence that the Prophet intended and endorsed an ongoing interpretive enterprise.

to Islam, especially Ubayy ibn Ka‘b and Ka‘b al-Ahbar (d. 32/652 or 34/654), Ikrama, and Sa‘id ibn Jubayr. This is evident from the hadith reports we examined earlier in this last chapter. In addition to having collected information received from the Prophet’s companions (*tafsir bi’l-ma’tthur*), Ibn ‘Abbas also derived interpretations through applying his own reasoning (*ijtihad bi’l-ra’y*) in his evaluation of the received materials. From Ibn ‘Abbas extends a lineage of Qur’an commentators, who in addition to transmitting the work of their teacher, became greatly respected commentators in their own right. The most prominent of these distinguished students of Ibn ‘Abbas include: Ikrama (d. 723-4), Mujahid (624-722), Sa‘id b. Jubayr (b. 655), and ‘Ata’ b. Abi Rabah (d. 732). The exegesis of all these students of Ibn ‘Abbas is incorporated in the *tafsir* of al-Tabari, who among all these authorities most frequently cites Ibn ‘Abbas. In addition to citing the above mentioned students of Ibn ‘Abbas’ who comprise the Meccan school, another major source for al-Tabari is Ubay b. Ka‘b and his Medinian school. Al-Tabari also cites traditions from Ibn Ma‘sud (d. AH 33) and his students known as the ‘Kufan school.

Ibn Ma‘sud was a companion who had extensive contact with the Prophet, having served him closely by doing menial work for him in his home. When transmitting reports of the Prophet he would tremble and break out in a sweat in his concern to transmit information faithfully and accurately. Nonetheless, he was inclined to giving allegorical interpretations. His propensity toward allegorical interpretation

has implications for understanding Sufi exegesis as sharing a continuity with aspects of the classical tafsir tradition. Allegorical readings have never been absent from the tradition of Qur'anic commentary. In this sense what the Sufi commentators developed had been established as one of many hermeneutical modes from the beginning of the tafsir tradition.

The classical tafsir tradition is exemplified in al-Tabari's compendium, *Jami' al-bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'an*. By the time he was forty, al-Tabari had traveled to Rayy, Kufa, Basra, and the towns of Egypt and Syria and had become a prominent scholar of tafsir and fiqh, as well as science and math. He developed his own *madhhab* the *Jaririya* (the name derives from his *nisba*, b. Jarir) which resembled the Shaf'i *maddhab* closely in principle, but did not continue. In al-Tabari's time, Baghdad, where al-Tabari wrote and taught, was becoming established as the center of learning for the Islamic world.

Al-Tabari's tafsir was the first comprehensive encyclopedic collection and evaluation of the cumulative tradition of exegesis from its origins from Ibn 'Abbas till his own time. Al-Tabari reviewed and evaluated the entire corpus of tafsir, incorporating the work of Sufyan al-Thawri (d. 161/777), Ma'mar ibn Rashid (d. 153/770; or 154/771), and Ibn Jurayj (d. 149/766 or 150/767). Although al-Tabari created a synthesis, his work is also of value because he included divergent interpretations. His collection became a standard upon which later exegetes drew and a

source for the advancement of tafsir as a multi-disciplinary systematic scholarly enterprise, reflected in the use of the term “sciences of the Qur’an” (*‘ulum al-qur’an*). After al-Tabari new directions in tafsir developed: e.g., the rationalist commentary of Zamakhshari (538/1075-538/1144) and the philosophical tradition of Razi. Though the tradition of Sufi commentary can be traced back to al-Tabari’s contemporary al-Tustari (d. 283/896),<sup>127</sup> the flowering of Sufi commentary happens with al-Qushayri’s teacher al-Sulami (d. 1021),<sup>128</sup> and with al-Qushayri himself (d. 1072). In addition to the extensive material he collected in his tafsir, al-Tabari also conveyed exegetical material in his forty volume *Ta’rikh al-Rusul wa ‘l-Muluk* (*The History of Messengers and Kings*).<sup>129</sup>

In al-Tabari’s work we find the integration of *tafsir bi ‘l-ma’thur* (interpretations received from the prophet, his companions, and their successors) and *tafsir bi ‘l-ra’y* (interpretation through reason or opinion). At this point it is helpful to understand the controversy surrounding the role of “interpretation through reason” (*tafsir bi ‘l-ra’y*). Distrust of this method arises from a hadith transmitted by Ibn ‘Abbas: “...Those who interpret the Qur’an by independent reasoning (*ra’y*) will have

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<sup>127</sup> On Sahl al-Tustari Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: the Qur’anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl al-Tustari* (d. 283/896) (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

<sup>128</sup> Gerhard Bowering, “The Qur’an Commentary of al-Sulami”

<sup>129</sup> Abu Jafar Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, *Ta’rikh al-Rusul wa ‘l-Muluk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje et al, III series Leiden 1879-1901. Translated as *The History of al-Tabari*, 39 vols., ed. Ehsan Yar-Shatar (Albany: S.U.N.Y, 1987)

their place prepared for them in the fire of hell.”<sup>130</sup> R. Marsden Speight<sup>131</sup> suggests that in the light of parallel hadith accounts and the vital role of independent reason in tafsirs such as al-Tabari’s, that the issue is not one of two separate methodologies. The real concern is that of avoiding exegesis which ignores the received knowledge of experts in grammar, law, hadith, and other disciplines. This knowledge (*‘ilm*) which is oriented around practicing the sunna is “...useful for the worship of God and for life in society.”<sup>132</sup> Thus al-Tabari’s tafsir is a treasury of received interpretation (*ma’tthur*) guided and informed by the judicious use of independent reason (*ra’y*):

Practically speaking, even that great monument to *ma’tthur* interpretation which is the commentary of al-Tabari (d. 310/922) contains much that can be labelled as *tafsir bi’l-ra’y*. That work was accepted by partisans of *hadith*, because *ra’y* was exercised in it according to the established principles of *‘ilm* and of discernment (*qawarin al-‘ilm wa-al-nazar*)<sup>133</sup>

As we shall see, Sufi commentators could defend the authenticity of their exegesis from allegations of individual opinion (*tafsir bi’l-ra’y*) on two bases: their work incorporated a knowledge of the foundational sciences, and their hermeneutics was based on the authority of their training and experience with inner knowledge (*‘ilm ladunni*) and knowledge of the unseen (*‘ilm al-ghayb*). On the basis of their

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<sup>130</sup> Al-Tirmidhi, *al-Jami’, tafsir*, I, quoted in Alan Godlas, “Psychology and Self-Transformation in the Sufi Qur’an Commentary of Ruzbihan Baqli” unpublished paper.

<sup>131</sup> R. Marsden Speight, “The Function of *hadith* as Commentary on the Qur’an,” pp. 63-81.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid*, 87. An important implication of this perspective on the ethical, experiential, and practical dimensions of *‘ilm* is that it more closely resembles the Sufi commentators’ methodology of “symbolic allusion” (*isharat*) in which the commentator’s own experience opens the text’s meaning in accordance with relevant and lived realities of the spiritual path.



competence and attention to fundamental exegetical disciplines and the “objectivity” of their mystical knowledge, they viewed their work as untainted by personal opinion or independent -- i.e. arbitrary or gratuitous -- judgment. Their exegesis reflected a consensus of earlier Sufis and was confirmed by knowledge based on spiritual achievement through rigorous training.

In his tafsir, al-Tabari presents the consensus of viewpoints in the history of Qur’anic commentary, coupled with his editorial evaluation of the merits of different interpretations. Peter Heath has described and discussed this under the term “hermeneutic pluralism.”<sup>134</sup> In Heath’s view, “...[I]t is rare that he [al-Tabari] does not endorse one interpretation...On the other hand, he rarely explicitly discounts alternatives.”<sup>135</sup> Al-Tabari applied his collected knowledge (*ma’tthur*) and scholarly aptitude (*ra’y*) to such issues as grammar, variant readings of the text, and historical background. What Heath describes as “hermeneutic pluralism” reflects al-Tabari’s adherence to received traditions (*tafsir bi l-ma’tthur*) as reliable sources; what Heath describes as “endorsement” reflects al-Tabari’s use of reasoning (*ra’y*) to critically evaluate the best interpretation from among a variety of sound views. A description of al-Tabari’s tafsir by one of his students expresses the range and depth of al-Tabari’s work:

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<sup>133</sup> *ibid*, 68

<sup>134</sup> Peter Heath, “Creative Hermeneutics: a Comparative Analysis of Three Islamic Approaches,” *Arabica* XXXVI (1989), 185.

He explains in it [the commentary] its [the Qur'an's] ordinances, its abrogating and abrogated verses, its difficult and unusual expressions, its meanings, the differences of opinion among interpreters and scholars concerning its ordinances and interpretation, and what he himself considers correct, the destinal inflexion of its letters, arguments against those who disbelieve in it, stories and traditions of the Muslim community, [accounts] of the day of resurrection, and other things of the ordinances and wonders it contains; word for word, verse by verse, from its very beginning until its end.<sup>136</sup>

By assessing the issues, topics, and methodology of traditional commentators leading up to and including al-Tabari, we can better understand the distinctive aspects and orientations of the Sufi tafsirs. We also can begin to see the methodological and stylistic continuity between the genres of classical tafsir (*tafsir bi 'l-ma'thur*) and Sufi tafsirs. Both genres incorporate previous traditions from hadith and earlier commentators. In both genres, the commentators integrate received materials with independent critical evaluation. To what issues does al-Tabari devote his attention in his tafsir? In giving some highlights we can also detect the main styles of al-Tabari's exegesis.

Al-Tabari primarily addresses grammatical, semantic, historical, and narratological concerns. These parallel and complement earlier hadith reports. After giving a summary of these points, we will examine how al-Tabari's treatment of the story of Moses' journey with Khidr presages discussions of knowledge and teaching authority which correspond to the discussions in the Sufi tafsirs. Here we outline al-

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>136</sup> Abu Muhammad 'Abd Allah al-Farghani (d. 362/972-3) quoted in Shams ad-Din Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Ahmad ad-Da'udi (d. 945/1533-34), *Tabaqat al-mufasssirun*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1983) 2:114, quoted in Peter Heath, *ibid*, p. 181, n. 15.

Tabari's exegesis in his tafsir along with some of the material he incorporates in his *Ta'rikh (History)*.<sup>137</sup>

As the hadith accounts emphasized, al-Tabari affirms that the Moses of this narrative is Moses, the son of 'Imran whose story is narrated in the Torah and elsewhere in the Qur'an. The two seas are the "Roman Sea in the west" (Mediterranean) and the Persian Gulf in the east.<sup>138</sup>

An alternative account identifies the meeting of the two seas in North Africa at Tanja (Tangier).<sup>139</sup> The length of time Moses announces he is willing to travel (*huqub*) is assessed as an epoch (*dahr*).<sup>140</sup> Al-Tabari gives details about the nature of the fish and the configuration of the water through which he disappears. Some say the fish was salted.<sup>141</sup> God set the river (*'arab*) as the marker of His decree identifying the meeting of the two seas.<sup>142</sup> Al-Tabari transmits different interpretations of the fish's disappearance through the archway of water: the fish circled; the fish went through the ground; the water was frozen; the water was hard as a rock. The reason for the

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<sup>137</sup> Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*. Material on Moses and Khidr appears in volume three of *The History of al-Tabari: The Children of Israel*. trans. William M. Brinner (Albany: SUNY, 1991), 1-18.

<sup>138</sup> Al-Tabari, *Jami'* vol. 15, no. 23167-8.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, 23172.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, 23176.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*, 23182.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 23182.

journeying by Moses and his servant is the knowledge given to Khidr from the presence of God.<sup>143</sup>

When not referring to Khidr by name, al-Tabari calls him, the “sage” (*al-‘alim*). In his *Ta’rikh*, al-Tabari identifies al-Khadir’s time as the reign of the Persian mythical king Afridhun (Fredon). Other sources al-Tabari transmits in his *Ta’rikh* associate Khidr with Dhu’l-Qarnayn (Alexander the Great), who is said in these traditions to have arbitrated for Abraham at Beersheba. While serving over the vanguard of Dhu’l-Qarnayn, Khidr found the water of life, drank it and became immortal. Another report says Khidr was the son of one of Abraham’s community who joined Abraham in his emigration from Babylon. Khidr’s full name was Baliya ibn Malikan.<sup>144</sup> His genealogy is given as the son of Peleg, five generations descended from Noah.

Such less substantiated traditions are reserved for al-Tabari’s *Ta’rikh*. For example, in the *Ta’rikh*, al-Tabari sorts out the question of the relationship between Khidr and Elijah. Al-Khidr, al-Tabari asserts, was a Persian, Elijah an Israelite. The two are said to have met during annual festivals. Al-Tabari repeats and repudiates Ibn Ishaq’s remarkable identification of al-Khadir as Jeremiah. Al-Tabari reiterates the hadith accounts which begin with Moses claiming to be the most learned of God’s creatures. Al-Tabari also transmits the other motifs introduced in hadith which inform

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 23203.

<sup>144</sup> A complete rendering of Khidr’s name is alternatively given by Simnani as Abu’l ‘Abbas Balyan ibn Qalyan ibn Faligh al-Khidr. See Massignon, *Essay*, p. 91

the narration: the exchange of greetings; the bird pecking water; Moses' pattern of forgetting; and Muhammad's wish for more of the story to have been known, had Moses only shown greater patience. Al-Tabari transmits Ibn 'Abbas' report that Moses and his people had settled in Egypt after their victory over Pharaoh. In Ibn 'Abbas' account, God sends Gabriel to correct Moses for claiming to have the most knowledge. In this account, when Moses returns to the rock, he finds the fish, follows it by poking with his staff, and discovers that whatever the fish touches dries up and turns to rock. The fish leads Moses to an island in the sea. Another account from Ibn 'Abbas describes Moses, not proudly claiming to be the wisest, but rather in conversation with God, asking a series of questions which culminates in "Which of your servants is the wisest?" Another transmission places Moses' commission to find Khidr at the time and place of the splitting of the sea. In this version, someone simply tells Moses of a man wiser than he. God restores the fish to life and it crawls on the shore before swimming again.<sup>145</sup>

With few exceptions, al-Tabari transmits material which explains the narrative in order to give background. However, at times, al-Tabari does shift into analogical readings. For example, al-Tabari distinguishes between Moses' motives in his different protests: his protests over the boat and the youth were both for the sake of God,

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<sup>145</sup> Al-Tabari, *Ta'rikh*, 417; *History* III, 17.

whereas his question about rebuilding the wall was motivated by his own gain.<sup>146</sup> This very interpretation is adopted by al-Qushayri and al-Qashani in their exegesis of 18.77.

In distinction to the preponderance of his literal exegesis (*'ibara*), al-Tabari makes a number of exegetical moves which place certain portions of the commentary a few steps in the direction of the Sufi commentaries. In a few cases the tone of these interpretations prefigures the interpretations of the Sufi commentators.

### *Al-Tabari on Inner Knowledge and Teaching Authority*

We now turn to examining those passages in al-Tabari's tafsir which focus on knowledge (*'ilm*) and point to the authority of the teacher. This examination will provide a basis of comparison with the treatment of these themes in Sufi commentaries. Discussing the term "divinely-disclosed knowledge" (*'ilm ladunni*), a term derived from "And we taught him from Ourselves knowledge" (*'allamnahu min ladunna 'ilm*), al-Tabari reports that this was the cause of the journey (*safar*) of Moses and the servant and concludes: "...He [God] guided him to a sage (*'alim*) who would increase his knowledge of himself to himself."<sup>147</sup> In this sense, Khidr's gift exemplifies what might otherwise be explicitly identified as a particularly Sufi mode of

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<sup>146</sup> Idem., *Ta'rikh* 423; *History* III.12.

<sup>147</sup> Idem, *Jami'*, no. 23203.

knowing, following the saying quoted by Sufis, “Whoever knows himself, knows his Lord.”<sup>148</sup>

Al-Tabari defines Khidr’s knowledge as “knowledge of the unseen” (*‘ilm al-ghayb*) which goes deeper than the explicit terms of justice. Al-Tabari paraphrases Khidr’s statement, “How can you be patient about what your understanding does not encompass?” (18.68) with a gloss that defines the terms of the distinctions between the levels of understanding of Moses and Khidr. In al-Tabari’s paraphrase, Khidr’s reply takes on an almost Sufi significance: “That is, you only know of the visible outer (*zahir*) part of justice and you cannot encompass what I know of the unseen (*‘ilm al-ghayb*).”<sup>149</sup>

At one point, al-Tabari touches on the theme of submitting to and following the teacher:

He [Moses] said, “You will find me if God wills, patient. (18.69a) concerning what I see from you and even if it contradicts what seems to be correct.” (And I will not disobey you in anything” (18.69b) He said, “I will go to the end of what you command me to do, even if it does not agree with my passions...Certainly I [Khidr] have taught you and the work that I do is in the realm of the unseen knowledge which you cannot encompass.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> (*Man ‘arafa nafsahu fa-qad ‘arafa rabbahu.*) This tradition, sometimes claimed as a hadith, can be found in Javad Nurbaksh, *Traditions of the Prophet* Vol. 2 (New York: Nimatullahi Publications, 1983), 45. As reported by Ajluni, Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240) said, “If this hadith is not sound by way of its transmitters (*min tariq al-riwaya*), from our perspective it is sound by way of unveiling (*min tariq al-kashf*).” (*Kashf al-Khafa’*, vol. 2, p. 343), quoted in Alan Godlas, “Psychology and Self-Transformation in the Sufi Qur’an Commentary of Ruzbihan al-Baqli,” 58-59, fn. 37.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 23209.

<sup>150</sup> Al-Tabari, *Jami’*, p. 256, no. 23214.

In his comments on Khidr's caution, "You will not be able to have patience with me..." (18.67; 23214) al-Tabari explains:

This is [because]: I am working according to an inner [aspect of] knowledge (*bi-batin al-'ilm*) [which] God taught me and the only kind of knowledge which you have [which] is only of the outer aspects of affairs. So that is why you cannot be patient regarding what you see of actions. [This is] just as we mentioned from information (*khabar*) from Ibn 'Abbas before, that he [Khidr] was a man who worked in the [realm of] the unseen (*al-ghayb*) who knew that.<sup>151</sup>

One of the subtle issues in the story of Khidr and Moses involves the question of Moses' excuses to Khidr. Al-Tabari reports that some of the interpreters (*ahl al-ta'wil*) differ on this point. According to some of the interpreters, when Moses requests of Khidr, "Do not blame me for forgetting..." (18.73), he was challenging Khidr. But al-Tabari concludes, alluding to sound hadith, that Moses was admitting he had broken his promise not to ask.<sup>152</sup> Continuing his examination of Moses's *adab* with Khidr, al-Tabari evaluates Moses's plea, "Do not make my affair difficult." (18.73b): "It would have been more worthy of Moses that he forgot."<sup>153</sup> Finally, when Moses proposes to Khidr that Khidr cease keeping company with him if he raises questions again, this is because of Moses's shame. Al-Tabari recounts that the Prophet would follow this verse by saying, "Moses was ashamed before God."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 23214.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 23221.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Bukhari, *Kitab al-Shurut*, 3.50.12.888 "Moses then violated the agreement for the first time because of forgetfulness..." and idem, *Kitab al-Tafsir* 6.60.250: "The first inquiry of Moses was done because of forgetfulness; the second caused him to be bound with a stipulation; and the third was done intentionally."

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 23230.



Al-Tabari correlates the hidden dimension of the unseen with an “inner [aspect of] knowledge.” (*bi-batin ‘ilm*) which he calls “knowledge of the unseen” (*‘ilm al-ghayb*). Al-Tabari develops this within the context of Khidr’s warning about Moses’ impatience:

How will you be patient O Moses, over what you see of my actions which you do not see in their correct aspects, although they are established correctly for me. You did however judge with the greatest degree of correctness, though also error regarding the outer form (*bi’l-zahir*) by the degree of knowledge you had. But my actions happen without an outer proof (*dalil zahir*) recognizable to your eyes, because it is established with reasons disclosed later, not immediately. You cannot know [this] by being told because it is unseen. Your knowledge does not encompass the knowledge of the unseen (*‘ilm al-ghayb*).<sup>155</sup>

This term “knowledge of the unseen” (*‘ilm al-ghayb*) derives from the divine title “Knower of the unseen and the manifest” (*‘Alim al-ghaybi wa al-shahada*)<sup>156</sup> While the use of the terms *batin* and *‘ilm al-ghayb* do not establish al-Tabari as a Sufi exegete, these terms establish a bridge joining the traditions of commentary based on received tradition (*tafsir bi’l-ma’tsur*) and commentary based on symbolic allusion (*tafsir al-isharat*), or Sufi commentary. As we shall see, Ruzbihan describes Khidr’s knowledge as “wisdom of the unseen” (*hikam al-ghayb*). In fact all three of our Sufi commentators engage a raft of terms which conceptually involve the unseen and the inward. Ruzbihan and al-Qashani both use the motif of the two sons’ retrieving their buried treasure to

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 256, 23209.

<sup>156</sup> Surat al-Hashr (59. 22)

symbolize a movement from the outer to the inner and, as al-Qashani puts it, as a gnosis known only within the “station of the heart (*maqam al-qalb*).”<sup>157</sup>

In his concluding statements al-Tabari touches on themes which are more fully developed in the Sufi commentaries. Unlike the Sufi commentaries, al-Tabari has taken the story’s imposition of the limits to Moses’ knowledge as a lesson that Moses should not wish for swift punishment. In a move in some ways more radical than any which the Sufi exegetes will make, al-Tabari suggests that even God’s enemies are doing God’s work. This ambiguity of agency and the deeper, hidden logic of the postponement of divine punishment suggests the reversal of the obvious meaning, implicit in the allegorical readings of the Sufi commentators. Most significantly al-Tabari identifies the lessons in this story about God’s punishment as a lesson which only the saints (*awliya*’) would understand. While al-Tabari’s reference to saints does not place him in the direct realm of Sufi commentary, his introduction of an exclusive and elusive ‘hermeneutics of the saints’ paves the way for the Sufi commentators to progress on that exegetical path which is lined with signs seen only by the saints.

And His statement: “That is the ultimate interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of what you could not bear with patience.” (18.82) That is to say, ‘This is what I mentioned to you of the causes on account of which I performed the deeds for which you criticized me.’ “*Ta’wīl*” means what returns to itself and returns of the deeds [about] which you could not leave off questioning me concerning [these deeds] and you refused to be patient about it.

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<sup>157</sup> Al-Qashani, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim (The Interpretation of the Noble Qur’an)*, ed. Mustafa Ghalib (2 vols.; Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1978), vol. 1, p. 771 (ad. 18.70).

These are the stories which God, the Great and Majestic, revealed (*akhbara*) to His Prophet Muhammad (S.) concerning Moses and his companion. [These were intended as] God's training for Moses. God instructed him to desist from hastiness in seeking to punish the idolaters who reviled him and derided both him and his book. And God informed him that He was acting through them both in what you see with the eyes and what occurs in a similar way [to what you see with the eyes] as sometimes occurs for the saints (*awliya*).

Indeed God's deeper meaning becomes evident to His saints (*awliya*) with respect to the states of his enemies through the deeds which He does to them just as the deeds of Sahib Musa [i.e., Khidr] conveyed a meaning contrary to what seemed outwardly evident as right (*sihha*) to Moses since he [Moses] did not know what their outcomes were; in fact, they were performed correctly [by Khidr] on the level of the real; and they [the outcomes] were on the mark. And the saying of God Almighty attests to the truth of this: "And your Lord is the Forgiver, the Possessor of Mercy. If He were to take them to account for what they have earned, then He would have hastened their punishment. But they have an appointed time beyond which they will find no refuge." (18.58) Then he followed it up with the story of Moses and his companion where God made known to His Prophet [Moses] that He did not make evident to the idolaters His not hastening their punishment. Indeed that is the case, as those who do not know God reckon what He does as what God had planned for them. Yet the deeper meaning (*ta'wil*) occurs through their [eventual] destruction and ruin by the sword in this world and their deserving from God in the next world eternal punishment.<sup>158</sup>

Al-Tabari reminds us that *ta'wil* involves returning to the source. *Ta'wil* is "what returns to itself, and returns of the deeds..." It traces a path from manifestation to origins. At that point of return a "meaning contrary to what seem[s] evidently right" is disclosed. And what powers that return is patience. Al-Tabari identifies *ta'wil* as a kind of 'hermeneutics of the saints.' This association between Khidr and sainthood will become more explicitly and fully developed in Sufi tafsirs.

In sum, al-Tabari enriches the narrative deeply at the literal level, and initiates some interpretations at the analogical level (*ishara*). However his preliminary exegesis of symbolic allusion (*isharat*) is implicit in the hadith, and his horizons of interpretation only suggest the radically inner and existential orientation that we will

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<sup>158</sup> Al-Tabari, *Jam'*, vol. 8, 23274, p. 270.

find in the Sufi tafsirs. While al-Tabari provides extensive and detailed background on Khidr and Moses as figures, he devotes little attention to analyzing the nature of their relationship. Even more striking, al-Tabari does not consider if or how the relationship between Khidr and Moses might serve as a literary model for actual social or institutional relationships. He reserves the companionship of Moses and Khidr reserved uniquely to its own status as a relationship among exemplary beings. It is left to the Sufi commentators to adopt this story as a paradigm and precedent for the master-disciple relationship (*suhba*), for the training it produces, and also for the special forms of knowledge and experience which are imparted on the journey of moral training (*safar al-ta'dib*).

#### *Preliminary Observations on Intertextuality Among Sufi Tafsirs*

Like their counterparts in the stream of received traditions (*tafsir bi 'l-ma'thur*), Sufi commentators followed a lineage of interpretation traced back to Ibn 'Abbas and the Prophet Muhammad. Sufi exegetes especially valued traditions received from, or ascribed to, the Prophet's close companion and son-in-law, 'Ali ibn 'Abi Talib (598-661), and his descendents, most importantly: Husayn (5-61/624-680), Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 113/731) and Ja'far as-Sadiq (d. 148/765), the sixth Shi'i Imam. A tafsir attributed to Ja'far al-Sadiq stands prominently as a work transmitted by both Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri (180/796-245/860) and Ibn 'Ata' al-Baghdadi (d.

309/921).<sup>159</sup> What we know of Ja ‘far’s text comes through its citations in later Sufi tafsirs.<sup>160</sup> We find the ideas of Ja‘far al-Sadiq and Ibn ‘Ata’ clearly cited and identified by Ruzbihan. The interpretations of Ja‘far al-Sadiq, Dhu’l-Nun al-Misri, and Ibn ‘Ata’ also inform the tafsir of al-Qushayri and the tafsir of al-Qushayri’s spiritual forbear ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1032), *Haqa’iq al-Tafsir*. This stream of transmission provided a foundation from which both the tafsirs of al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan derived information, inspiration, and authority.

An early commentary valued in Sufi exegesis is that of Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 150/767). Muqatil asserted five points about the narrative of Khidr and Moses: (1) Moses’ journey with Khidr happened after he had received the Torah; (2) Khidr’s second name was Elisha, derived (playfully) from *wasa’a* (to envelope) signifying that his knowledge “enveloped six heavens and six earths;” (3) Khidr is not only an elevated or distinguished prophet, but also a saint (*wali*). This statement represents a very early identification of Khidr as a saint (*wali*), and the suggestion of sainthood (*walaya*; *wilaya*) as in some way superior to prophecy; (4) *Rahma* is grace (*ni‘ma*) and this grace is prophethood (*nubuwwa*). This statement extends the determination of Khidr as a prophet, since it relates to the Qur’anic motif that Khidr had received compassion

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<sup>159</sup> Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: the Qur’anic Hermeneutics of Sufi Sahl al-Tustari* (d. 283/896). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980, 43, 51, 55, 129, 265; Paul Nwiya, *Exegese coranique et langage mystique*. (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq Editeurs, 1970; Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Mi’raj, Poetic and Theological Writings*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), pp. 75-89.

<sup>160</sup> Sells, *ibid.*, p. 329, n. 1. Paul Nwiya, “Le Tafsir Mystique Attribue a Ga ‘far Sadiq: Edition Critique,” *Melanges de l’Universite Saint Joseph* 43 (Beirut, 1968): 181-230.

from God (*rahma min 'indina*); and (5) Khidr achieved immortality based on his obedience, selfless motives, and adherence to divine unity (*tawhid*).<sup>161</sup>

Sufi Qur'an commentaries (*tafsir*) have served as a foundation for linking and legitimating mystical experience and spiritual training with the authority of Quranic revelation. As a genre, Sufi tafsirs reflect the accumulation and evolution of a corpus of knowledge and experience related intentionally to Quranic contexts.<sup>162</sup> In particular, the case of the Quranic narrative of the companionship between Moses and his guide Khidr provides an exceptionally rich locus for considering relative roles of spiritual authority, patterns of guidance, and systems of training. By examining four tafsir treatments of this narrative, we will explore some of the ways the later Sufi tafsirs of Ruzbihan (d. 1209) and al-Qashani (d. 1329) extend certain possibilities implicit in two earlier tafsirs: the mainstream encyclopedic tafsir of al-Tabari (d. 923) and the Sufi tafsir of al-Qushayri (d. 1072). Then we may be able to suggest a relationship between the developments reflected in these tafsirs to the development of narratives of Khidr in hagiographical citations.

In their discussions of the story of the companionship (*suhba*) between Moses and Khidr, these four tafsirs examine categories of knowledge, mystical experience, and

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<sup>161</sup> Paul Nwiya, *Exegese Coranique et Langage Mystique*. (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1970), 88-90.

<sup>162</sup> Carl Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1997), p. 40. Fritz Meier, "The Transformation of Man in Mystical Islam," in *Man and Transformation: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*. (Bollingen Series XXX.5.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 64.

spiritual training. The lexicon of terms from the Quranic narrative offers rich possibilities for these exegetes. Companionship (*suhba*) emerges as the vehicle for the disciple's journey into the realm of knowledge, experience, and training characterized by states of unveiling (*kashf*) and witnessing (*mushahada*). In the companionship of *suhba*, mentoring is a bridge to inner knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*). Beyond words, or concepts, it requires states cultivated through a mentoring relationship of companionship (*suhba*). This notion to which al-Qushayri, alludes is directly asserted by al-Qashani: "All of the dialogues are in the language of a [spiritual] state."<sup>163</sup>

Earlier we examined the Prophet's criticism of Moses' actions: "We would have wished that Moses had been patient; then Allah would have narrated more of their story." and: "He [Moses] intentionally asked Khidr and caused the condition [of Moses' excuse] to be applied."<sup>164</sup> As we see from the Prophet's remarks *suhba* requires the double recognition of the respect for the status of one's teacher and patience. Specifically this patience involves resisting early closure; it is a patience which is resists rushing to "conclusory" judgments, conclusory meaning, or an illusion of finality.

Khidr's teaching acts occur within a journey (*safar*) testing the patience of his fellow-traveler Moses. Teaching and training require building tensions, raising and challenging expectations, and ultimately, shocks and surprises. And learning occurs in

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<sup>163</sup> Al-Qushayri, *ibid.*, 768.

action, relationship, and submission. It is in the context of relationship – entering the place where two seas meet – that the concepts and content spring to life and reach the completeness and integration called “true meaning” (*ta'wil*).

Our examination of Sufi tafsirs in comparison with al-Tabari's tafsir, and Hadith situates the contribution of the explicitly Sufi tafsirs, not as distinctly different, but rather along a continuum among earlier exegetical voices. While the contribution of the Sufi tafsirs is continuous with the main stream of the tafsir tradition, the development of themes of companionship, training, and knowledge is deepened in the Sufi commentaries through their application to the *murshid-murid* relationship, Sufi metaphysics and Sufi psychology.

Sufi commentators engage in a “hermeneutic of recognition” in which the Qur'an provides not only a light which illumines, but also a mirror which reflects authentic mystical experience. Such experience, in their view, is the fruit of disciplined and supervised training, not subjectivity. In this view such rigorous engagement validates their hermeneutic and its exegesis as objective because it is based on authentic and systematic spiritual training and experience.

We can now glimpse the process by which Sufi commentators develop Quranic narrative to legitimate not only mystical experience and knowledge, but also spiritual guidance (*rushd*) and companionship or mentoring (*suhba*). To this end, we need to trace the ways in which exegetes mined the narrative of the companionship between

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<sup>164</sup> *Sahih Bukhari* vol. IV. book 55. Chapter 23. Section 613, p. 405.



Khidr and Moses. They unearth the potential of the figure of Khidr to encode, inform, and authorize both the role of the *murshid* and the training of the *murid*. It was especially through reference to the figure of Khidr that they could describe and legitimate spiritual companionship or mentoring (*suhba*).

## CHAPTER THREE

### SUFI TAFSIRS IN TRANSLATION: TRANSLATIONS OF THE SECTIONS OF THREE SUFI TAFSIRS' TREATMENTS OF THE STORY OF KHIDR AND MOSES (QUR'AN 18.60-82)

This chapter offers translations of the full text of the sections of three significant Sufi *tafsirs* which discuss the story of Moses and Khidr (Qur'an 18.60-82). The three translated *tafsirs* and the textual sources for them are as follows:

Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Lata'if al-isharat*, ed. Ibrahim Basyuni (6 vols.; Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1968-71). Vol 2, pp. 406-412.

Ruzbihan b. Abi Nasr al-Fasa'i al-Daylami al-Baqli al-Shirazi, Sadr al-Din Abu Muhammad, *'Ara'is al-bayan fi haqa'iq al-qur'an / The Brides of Explanation on the Realities of the Qur'an*. Cawnpore (1285/1868-9) Calcutta 1300/1883; Karachi (1310/1892-3) (Arabic Lithographs) Lithograph supplied by Alan Godlas.

'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (attributed to Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi), *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, ed. Mustafa Ghalib (2 vols.; Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 766-773.

All of these works, and the sections offered here in translation have not been previously translated. I note here correspondences among the three texts, but I treat these correspondences more fully in the subsequent chapter, where I also provide an extended analysis and interpretation of major themes within the texts. Because hadith

references are also crucial, I give them in my presentation of the translations. I also provide the source paginations interalia and identify all quotations wherever possible.

**Abu al-Qasim ibn Hawazin al-Qushayri (376/986-465/1072), *Lata'if al-Isharat*<sup>1</sup>**

[p. 406] The statement of Allah, Exalted be His Mention: **“And when Moses said to his young servant (*fatahu*), ‘I will not cease until I reach the meeting of the two seas (*majma’ al-ba.hrain*) or I will continue for ages. And when they reached the meeting between them, they forgot their fish and it took its way (*sabilahu*) into the sea through an opening (*saraba*).”** (18.60-61)

When the companionship (*suhba*) of Joshua with Moses (upon whom be peace) was confirmed, then he deserved the title of *al-futuwwa* (noble servanthood). As it says: **“And when Moses said to his young servant (*fatahu*)...”** It is a name bestowed for honor (*karama*), not as a designation (*'alama*). He made the entrance of the fish into the water as a marker (*'alama*) for finding Khidr. There he made forgetfulness enter into both [Moses and Joshua] so that it might extend [*ablugha*] the sign (*aya*) and place it beyond human choice.

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<sup>1</sup> Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Lata'if al-isharat*, ed. Ibrahim Basyuni (6 vols.; Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1968-71). Vol 2, 406-412.

The statement of the Exalted: **“And when they had passed on [Moses] said to his young servant, “Give us our meal. We have encountered on our journey [at] this [point] fatigue.” (18.62)**

Moses was burdened [*mutahammal*] in this journey. It had been a journey of moral training (*ta'dib*) and the endurance of hardship. This is because he went to increase his knowledge. The state (*hal*) of seeking knowledge is a state of moral training and a time of enduring (*tahammul*) hardship. And for this [reason] he was stricken by hunger. Thus he [Moses] said, **“We have encountered on our journey [at] this [point] fatigue.” (18.62)** [On Mount Sinai] when he fasted during the period of waiting to hear Divine Speech, he was patient for thirty days and he did not get stricken by hunger and hardship. Since his travel was to Allah, he was carried along [i.e., sustained].

The Statement of God, Exalted by His Mention: **“He said, ‘Did you see when we came to the rock? Indeed I forgot the fish and it was only Satan that caused me forget to mention that it took its way into the sea wondrously.’ He [Moses] said, ‘ That was what we were seeking.’ So they went back over their footsteps retracing [them].” (18.63-64)**

[p.407] Their journey was prolonged because they needed to turn away from their place. Then Joshua said, **“It was only Satan that caused me forget to mention**

**[it].”** (18.63) Allah, may He be Glorified, made forgetfulness enter him so that fishing would be one of his burdens. Then he [Moses] said, **“This is what we were seeking.”** (18.64) This means the entrance of the fish into water [even though the fish] was grilled. And that became for him [Moses] a miracle (*mu’jiza*). When they arrived at the place where the fish entered the water, they encountered Khidr.

The Statement of Allah, Exalted be His Mention **“And he found a servant from among Our servants; We gave him Mercy (*Rahma*) from Ourselves. And We taught him Knowledge from Our Presence [*‘allamnahu min ladunna ‘ilma*].”**

18. 65

When Allah designates a person as His servant, then it makes him among the elect of the elect [*jumlat min khass al-khawass*]. When he said “My servant [*‘abdi*]<sup>2</sup>,” he indeed made him among the elect of the elect.

**“...We gave him Mercy (*Rahma*) from Ourselves...”** (18.65) That is, he became bestowed with compassion [*marhum*] from Our direction through that *Rahma* reserved especially for him from Us. From this Khidr becomes bestowed with compassion, and with it he will be a bestower of mercy upon Our servants.

**“And We taught him Knowledge from Our Presence.”** (18.65) It is said that this knowledge is from the realm (*ladunn*) of Allah, that which is acquired by way of (*bi-*

*tariqi*) divine inspiration (*ilham*) without intentional effort.<sup>3</sup> It is also said that it is that by which God (*al-Haqq*) – May He be Glorified -- makes known the elect from among His servants. It is said that it is that by which through its righteousness (*salah*) God (*al-Haqq*) makes known His saints (*awliya* ' ) from among His servants.

[p. 408] And it is said [that] it [ *'ilm al- ladunni* ] is that which gives no benefit to its possessor (*sahibihi* ) Rather, its benefit is to His servants from what he possesses of God's Truth (*Haqq*), May He be Glorified. And it is said that it is the thing which its possessor [*sahib* ] will not be able to deny. And evidence [*dalil* ] for the validity of what he discovers [through *'ilm al-ladunni*] is unconnected to it. If you were to ask him concerning proof (*burhan*) he would not find any evidence. The most powerful of all knowledge is that which lies beyond proof (*dalil*).<sup>4</sup>

The statement of God, Exalted be His Mention: **“He [Moses] said to him [Khidr], ‘May I follow you that you may teach me of what you have learned of guidance (*rushd*).’ ”** (18.66)

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<sup>2</sup> Al-Qushayri has paraphrased the Quranic text which reads literally, “Our servant (*'ibadina*).”

<sup>3</sup> This explanation is quoted by Ruzbihan b. Abi Nasr al-Fasa'i al-Daylami al-Baqli al-Shirazi, Sadr al-Din Abu Muhammad, *'Ara'is al-bayan fi haqa'iq al-Qur'an (The Brides of Elucidation on the Realities of the Qur'an*. Cawnpore (1285/1868-9); Calcutta (1300/1883); Karachi (1310/1892-3) (Arabic Lithograph), p. 592.

<sup>4</sup> Ruzbihan quotes al-Qushayri in a paraphrase of these ideas: “[Abu] al-Qasim [al-Qushayri] said, ‘The science of discovery (*istinbat*) is by effort (*bi-kulfati*) and intermediaries (*wasa'it*) but, the direct knowledge (*'ilm al-ladunni*) is without effort or intermediaries.’ ” (Ruzbihan, *'Ara'is al-bayan*, p. 591)

He showed discretion (*talattufa*) in his address by taking the way of asking permission. Then he openly explained his intention (*maqsudihi*) toward companionship (*suhba*) through his statement “..that you may teach me what you have learned of guidance (*rushd*) .”

And it is said that the knowledge for which Khidr was selected was not taught to him by a teacher (*ustadh*), nor from a person. So if no one has taught him, then how would he be able to teach it to another?

The statement of God, Exalted be His Mention: “ **He said, ‘You will not be able to have patience with me. How can you be patient concerning what your understanding does not encompass?’** He [Moses] said, ‘**You will find me, God willing (*in sha’ Allah*), a patient [person], and I will not disobey you in anything.’** ” (18.67-68)

A question on that side and an answer on this side! So he [Khidr] discerned [*tadarak*] his heart in his saying, “**How can you be patient concerning what your understanding does not encompass?**” (18.68) And Moses answered, “**He said you will find me...**” (18.69) From the soul (*nafs*) of Moses are enumerated two things: [1] patience (*sabr*) and [2] that he will not disobey what he [Khidr] commands. As for

patience (*sabr*), he linked it with seeking the will of God (*istinsha'*).<sup>5</sup> And he said:

**“You will find me, God willing, a patient [person].”** (18.69) And he was patient as long as he was found to be one who is patient. In doing this he did not restrict Khidr’s hands, in terms of [limiting] his action.

As for the second, his statement: **“I will not disobey you in anything.”** (18.69) He declared it independently (*atlaqahu*) and did not connect it to seeking the will of God. And he did not betray what he sought [with God’s will]. And what was declared independently became a [point of] difference (*khulf*).

[p. 409] His statement, Exalted be His Mention: **“He said, ‘If you would follow me, then do not ask me about anything until I mention it to you.’”** (18.70). The disciple (*murid*) does not [have the right] to say “No” to his master (*shaykh*), nor the pupil (*tilmidh*) to his teacher (*ustadh*), nor the lay person to the learned jurisprudent (*al-‘alim al-mufti*) in his rendering of legal determinations (*yafṭa'*) and judgments (*yuhakimu*).

His statement, Exalted be His Mention: **“So they proceeded until they rode in the boat, he broke it. And he [Moses] said, ‘Did you break it to drown its people? You have done a strange thing.’”** (18.71) And when they rode on the boat (*fulk*) he

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<sup>5</sup> cf. Ruzbihan, p. 593. The Qur’anic paraphrase is from 16.127: “Be patient for your patience is only in God.”



damaged it. He did that in preservation (*ibqa'*) of its owner (*sahibihī*), so that the king who coveted ships would not desire a damaged ship.

His Statement “...to drown its people...” (18.71) This means, the outcome of this deed will lead to the drowning of its people, for he knew that this was not done with the purpose of drowning the people in the boat.

His Statement, Exalted be His Mention: “**He said, ‘Did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me?’**” (18.72) That is, you are looking at this from the point of view of knowledge. We are proceeding from the point of view of divine commandment (*hukm*).

His statement, Exalted be His Mention: “**He said, ‘Don’t take me to task for forgetting and don’t grieve me in my affair with difficulty.’**” (18.73)

He appeals to him with the stipulation of knowledge [*shart al-‘ilm*] in saying “**‘Don’t blame me that I forgot...’**,” because one who forgets is not held responsible (*taklif*).

He supported this when he linked it with his statement: “**And don’t grieve me with difficulty.**” (18.73)

[p. 410] And one who is capable of having rights is under obligation (*taklif*). But one who is not sound in action and exempt (*tark*) is not faced [with blame].<sup>6</sup> The person who forgets is of this category.

His Statement, Exalted be His Mention: **“They journeyed until when they encountered a youth and he [Khidr] killed him. He [Moses] said, ‘Did you slay a pure soul [who had not slain] another soul. Truly you have done a reprehensible thing.”** (18.74) It was in the nature of knowledge (*khuluq al-‘ilm*) and incumbent upon Moses, upon him be peace. His shortcoming was inevitable: he sees injustice on the surface (*zahir*). But concerning that which he knew from the state of Khidr, it was within his right to stop until he had determined whether it was prohibited (*mahzur*) or permissible (*mubah*). It was the overturning of the norm (*qalaba al-‘ada*).

His Statement, Exalted be His Mention: **“He [Khidr] said, “Did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me?”** (18.75) He repeated his statement **“..that you would not be able...”** because he [Moses] stopped at the condition of knowledge (*shart al-‘ilm*). But on the contrary it has to do with the state of unveiling (*kashf*), so Moses, upon him be peace, imposed conditions (*sharata*) on him, saying, **“He said, ‘If I ask you anything after this, then do not keep**

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<sup>6</sup> A lacuna in the text occurs here. The editor conjectures that the missing words are “with blame.”

**companionship (*la tusahibni*) with me. You have received directly from me an excuse.”** (18.76) He showed his disobedience three times. Since three is the outer limit of few and the inner limit of many, he could not find any kind of forgiveness after that.

His Statement, Exalted be His Mention: **“So they proceeded until they came to the people of the village. They sought food from its people, but they refused them hospitality. And they found in it [the village] a wall verging toward (*yurid*) destruction and he raised it up. He [Moses] said, ‘If you had wished you could have taken a reward for it.’ ”** (18.77)

[p. 411] It was incumbent upon the people of the village, based on their religious community (*milla*) that they should feed them [Moses and Khidr]. Moses did not know there would be no use in reproaching them. It would have been better had he disregarded it. So when Khidr raised their wall and didn't ask for a reward (*ajr*), Moses did not tell him, “You have done something prohibited (*mahzur*), but he said to him, **“If you had wished you could have taken a reward (*ajr* ).”** That is, “if you [Khidr] don't take it for your sake, [then] if you were to take it for our sake, your taking it would be better for us than leaving it. If they are entitled to their rights, then why did you forsake our rights?”

And it is said that his travel was a journey of moral training (*ta'dib*) so it was repeated to make him endure hardship (*mashq*). Except when he gave drink to the daughters of

Shu‘ayb what struck him of exhaustion and hunger was greater. At that time he could bear it and it was bearable. And when Moses said this Khidr said to him:

**“This is the parting between me and you. But I will tell you the ultimate meaning (*ta’wil*) of what you were not able to bear with patience.”** (18.78)

That is, after this, “Then there is no companionship (*suhba*) between us.”

And it is said Khidr said, “You are indeed a prophet...However, whatever compels you in what I said, you are obligated (*sharatta*) by the stipulations [of knowledge] (*shart*) [as] you said, **‘If I ask you about anything after this, then do not keep companionship with me’** Nonetheless I am acting on your statement.” And it is said when Moses did not remain patient with him in refraining from asking, Khidr was also not patient with him in continuing [their] companionship and [Khidr] chose separation (*firaq*).

And it is said that as long as Moses, upon whom be peace, asked on behalf of others -- in the matter of the boat which was on behalf of the poor ones and the killing of the soul without right (*haqq*), Khidr did not separate from him. When he spoke the third time, in seeking a gift of food for himself, he was afflicted in separation. So Khidr said to him, **“This is the parting between me and you.”** And it is said that just as Moses, upon whom be peace, desired the companionship (*suhba*) of Khidr for the purpose of increasing of knowledge, Khidr desired to leave the *suhba* of Moses, upon

whom be peace, from his propensity for seclusion (*khalwa*) with Allah [apart] from the created ones.

[p. 412] The statement of God, Exalted be His Mention: **“As for the boat, it belonged to poor people who worked on the sea and I wanted [*aradtu*] to make it useless, for there followed them a king who took every boat by force.”** (18.79)

When Khidr parted from Moses, upon him be peace, Khidr did not want [*lam yurid*] that there would remain [*yabqa*] in Moses’s heart even a semblance of objection [*shibhu al-i’tirad*]. So he removed that from his heart with what he clarified to him of his state [*hal*]. He unveiled [*kashafa*] to him that the secret of his intention in damaging the boat was its wholeness [*salamatuha*] and its preservation [*baqa’uha*] for its people so that the usurping king would not have any desire for it. And the preservation of the boat for its people while it was defective was better for them than if it were whole in the hands of the usurping king.

The statement of God, Exalted be His Mention: **“As for the youth, his parents were believers and We feared that he would oppress them with rebellion and disbelief.”** (18.80)

He clarified to him that the killing of the youth, because it had already been made known and decreed by God as a commandment (*hukm*) that his continuing to live

would be a trial (*fitna*) for his parents, and that the exchange of a replacement (*khalaf*) for him would be a happiness for them.

The Statement of God, Exalted be His Mention “**As for the wall, it belonged to two youths. They were orphans in the town and under it was a treasure belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man. So your Lord desired that they reach maturity and take out their treasure – a mercy from your Lord; and I did it not from my own command. This is the ultimate meaning of the events you could not bear with patience.**” (18.82)]

As for the repairing of the wall, it was for the purpose of making permanent [*istibqa'*] the treasure of the two youths [which involves] ceasing to seek friendship [*rifq*] from creatures [*khalq*].

**Ruzbihan Baqli, (522/1128-606/1209) ‘*Ara’is al-bayan al-haqa’iq al-qur’an* (The Brides of Elucidation of the Realities of the Qur’an, pp. 590-595)<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Ruzbihan b. Abi Nasr al-Fasa’i al-Daylami al-Baqli al-Shirazi, Sadr al-Din Abu Muhammad, ‘*Ara’is al-bayan fi haqa’iq al-qur’an* / *The Brides of Explanation on the Realities of the Qur’an*. Cawnpore (1285/1868-9) Calcutta 1300/1883; Karachi (1310/1892-3) (Arabic Lithographs) Lithograph supplied by Alan Godlas.

[p. 590] “When they had passed on, he [Moses] said to his servant, ‘Give us our meal; we have encountered on our journey [at] this [point] fatigue (*nasab* ).’ ”  
(18.62)

When they lost their way (*tariq*), they did not undertake the journey (*yasra* ) according to the heart, and fatigue (*nasab*) weighed them down. And that was through Allah’s instruction to them (*ta’lim Allah*) to go beyond the limit. The inner sense (*sirr*)<sup>8</sup> in the heart may apprehend wisdoms of the unseen (*hikam al-ghayb*), but the heart and the intellect did not know these [wisdoms]. The soul (*nafs*)<sup>9</sup> was brought to suffering in injury (*adha* ) through its ignorance of this [i.e., the wisdoms of the unseen (*hikam al-ghayb*)]. Had the heart and the soul known [this] as much as the inner sense (*sirr*) did, they [heart and soul] would not have been overcome by the dictates of exhaustion (*ahkam al-ta’ab*) or been enveloped by fatigue (*nasab*), no matter how much they were in the station of struggle (*mujahada*) and testing. Had Moses (Moses) been given the burden (*mahmulan*) of the share of witnessing at that point, then he would have been as he was on the mountain [*tur* (i.e., *tur sinin*, Mount

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<sup>8</sup> The term *sirr*, literally “secret,” involves the notion of a faculty of divine awareness “secreted” in the human heart. It is often translated as “secret” and “conscience.” The first term offers literal accuracy while missing the sense of a faculty of awareness. The second term “conscience” captures the archaic philosophical sense of *scintilla conscientiae*, the “spark of knowledge” and its Greek counterpart *synteresis/synderesis* which carries the etymological connotations of “careful guarding” and “preservation.” (These issues are addressed in Carl Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 18, 101.) Since the faculty of the *sirr* apprehends divine knowledge by a subtle and inner sense, and since the term “sense” applies to both understanding and a human faculty, we will adopt the translation “inner sense” for *sirr* in most cases.

<sup>9</sup> The term *nafs* will be translated according to its context as “soul,” “self,” and “ego,” since *nafs* means the self while suggesting “breath” (*nafas*), in a sense roughly analagous to the shared connotations of “soul” as “self” and “*anima* /animating principle.”

Sinai)], where he did not eat food for forty days and exhaustion did not overtake him.<sup>10</sup> This latter [condition of Moses on Sinai] is the state of the people of intimacy (*uns*) while the former [condition of Moses on this journey] is the state of those who aspire (*irada*). Don't you see how he [*Rasul Allah*] said "I pass the night with my Lord; He feeds me and gives me drink."<sup>11</sup> When he [Moses] was seeking mediation (*wasita*), he was veiled from the station of the witnessing (*mushahada*) and suffered in his striving (*mujahada*). And it was Truth<sup>12</sup> that trained him (*addabahu al-haqq*) in this [matter] so it did not occur to him that he had something of the knowledge of divine realities (*'ulum al-haqa'iq*), because the Exalted is jealous of whoever pretends to attain the secret of secrets. For that reason God sent him to learn (*ta'allum*) the knowledge of the unseen (*'ilm al-ghayb*). The Teacher [al-Qushayri] said Moses was burdened (*mahtamal*) in this journey.<sup>13</sup>

[p. 591] And it is a journey of cultivation (*ta'dib*) and the enduring (*ihtima*) of hardship (*mashaqqa*) because he went seeking the increase of knowledge. And the condition of seeking knowledge and the state of being trained is the time (*waqt*) of bearing hardship (*mashaqqa*), and for this reason he was stricken by hunger.<sup>14</sup> He said "We have encountered on this journey of ours overwhelming fatigue." (Qur'an 18.62)

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Qur'an, Sura al-A'raf (7.142-145).

<sup>11</sup> "...I sleep and my Lord makes me eat and drink." *Sahih Bukhari* Bk. 82; Ch. 29; Hadith 834.

<sup>12</sup> The Divine Name *al-Haqq* which may also be translated as "the Reality," is here translated, "Truth."

<sup>13</sup> al-Qushayri, *Lata'if*, p. 406

<sup>14</sup> These two sentences paraphrase al-Qushayri, *ibid*.



When he stood in need of waiting to hear the word from Allah, he (Moses) bore it patiently for thirty days and neither hunger nor hardship (*mashaqqa*) touched him,<sup>15</sup> because on this journey he was going to God and he was carried along [i.e., sustained].

[Then follows] the saying of the Exalted One:

**“And he found a servant from among Our servants.” (18.65a)**

In this there is a hidden indication that God, Glorified be He, has certain selected [*khawass<sup>am</sup>*] servants. They are those whom He selected for gnosis (*ma‘rifa*) from the sciences of Lordship (*‘ulum al-rububiya*), the secrets of unicity, the realities of wisdom and subtle graces of His angelic and majestic realms (*malakutihi wa jabarutihi*) that He reserves for himself.<sup>16</sup> They [these selected ones (*khawass*)] are the people of the unseen, [the people of] the unseen of the unseen, [the people of] the secret, and [the people of] the secret of the secret. [They are] the ones whom Allah has concealed in His concealment, veiled from His own creation out of compassion (*shafaqa*) for them due to the secret of God that they display. They are the servants in reality (*haqiqa*), those who reached the reality of servanthood, in the sense that Allah made their servanthood parallel (*muhadhiyan*) to His Lordship (*rububiyatihi*). Otherwise all [of His servants] are His servants from the viewpoint of creation, but they are servants in reality from the perspective of gnosis (*ma‘rifa*).

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<sup>15</sup> See Qur’an Baqara (2.51) and al-‘Araf (7.142-154).

<sup>16</sup> According to Carl Ernst, Ruzbihan generally conceives of these two terms as follows: *malakut* (the heart of the gnostic); *jabarut* (the imaginal realm). Ernst, *Ruzbihan*, p. 31.

Were it not for that pure characteristic (*al-khassiya al-mahda*), [i.e., that they are servants in truth] he [the Prophet Muhammad] (upon him be peace) would not have said, “I am indeed the servant -- *la ilaha illa Allah*. I am the servant in Truth, and no other.” What honor is more honorable for Khidr (upon him be peace) than this distinction that [Allah] called him a “servant.” And who in reality can be His servant? Were it not for His sufficient compassion (*law la rahmatahu al-kafiya*) which proceeds from pre-eternity (*azal*) to His servants? Otherwise it would not have been permissible for His servant to say “I am your servant,” for He [Allah] transcends (*munazzah*) the need to have the temporal (*hadathan*) truly serve Him.

And His Saying, be He Exalted:

**“We gave him mercy (*rahma*) from Us” (18.65b)**

[That is to say *rahma* means] sainthood (*wilaya*), nearness, witnessing.

**“And We taught him knowledge (*‘ilm*) from Our Presence.” (18.65b)**

This is a perfect gnosis (*ma‘rifa*) and a knowledge from among the types of knowledge [which is] an unknown, hidden knowledge (*‘ilm*) of His which is concealed from many of the elect (*akhyar* [“best ones”]). It is the special direct knowledge (*‘ilm al-ladunni*) which Allah has reserved for himself, and [for] the elect of His elect. And that knowledge [of God] is the wisdom of the unseen in an unknown form. Its realities correspond to the benefits (*manafi‘*) of creation. And this is connected to the knowledge of the world of divine actions whose proofs are intended to establish the [state of] servanthood. More

exceptional than this is the understanding (*wuquf*) of part of the secret of destiny (*sirr al-qadar*) before it happens; more special than that is knowledge of the [divine] names and the special qualities (*al-nu'ut al-khassa*) and more exceptional than that is the knowledge of the attributes (*sifat*) and more exceptional than that, the knowledge of the essence (*dhat*).

The knowledge of ambiguous [verses] (*mutashabbihat*) is a special [subset] within knowledge that is unknown. Everything linked to these [types of] knowledge (*al-'ulum*) is through unveilings and the appearance of what is unseen (*mughayyabat*). The primordial knowledge (*al-'ilm al-qadim*) which is a characteristic of the Truth (*Divine Truth*),<sup>17</sup> the Exalted, is part of the science of Lordship. This [primordial knowledge] is connected with special inspiration (*al-ilham al-khass*) and hearing the eternal speech (*al-kalam al-qadim*) without intermediary. And above this is what the Truth reserved for Himself especially (*li-nafsihi khassat<sup>m</sup>*). Creatures do not have access to this by any means (*bi-hal*).

Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri [180-245/796-859] said: "Direct knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ladunni*) is decreed for people in situations of divine assistance and abandonment."<sup>18</sup>

Ibn 'Ata [Abu'l 'Abbas Ahmad b. Sahl al-Amuli al-Adami (235-309)] said, "A knowledge without intermediary belongs to unveiling and is not gained through teaching

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<sup>17</sup> The Divine Name *al-Haqq* which may also be translated as "the Reality," is here translated, "the Truth."

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Deladriere, *La Vie Merveilleuse de Dhu'l-Nun l'Egyptian* (Paris: Sinbad), 145.

letters [i.e., not learned intellectually], for it is the meeting with Him through witnessing of spirits.”

Husayn [ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (244-309/857-922)] said, “Direct knowledge is a divine inspiration (*ilham*) by which God makes the inner senses eternal (*akhlada*) and is not subject to reversal.”<sup>19</sup>

Al-Qasim [Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri] said, “The science of discovery (*istinbat*) is by effort (*bi-kulfati*) and intermediaries (*wasa’it*) but, the direct knowledge [*al-‘ilm al-ladunni*] is without effort or intermediaries.”<sup>20</sup>

[Abu’l-Qasim Muhammad al-] Junayd [d. 910] said, “Direct knowledge is decreed for the inner senses free of location or actual opposition [i.e., dualities]. It is rather the unveilings of lights from the hidden absences (*maknun al-mughayyabat*) and this happens to the servant when he admonishes his limbs for all their deviations and extinguishes (*afna*) all desire (*irada*) from his movements. It becomes forms embodied (*shabh<sup>an</sup>*)<sup>21</sup> [p. 592] in the presence of the Truth without wish (*tamann*) and without intention (*murad*).

Sahl [al-Tustari (d. 896)] said inspiration (*ilham*) derives (*yanubu*) from Revelation (*al-wahy*) as he said “your Lord revealed (*awha*) to the bee...” [Qur’an 16.68] and “We revealed to the mother of Moses...” [Qur’an 28.7]. Both are inspiration (*ilham*).

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<sup>19</sup> cf. Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism* (trans. Benjamin Clark) (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), s.v., *.s-r-f*, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. al-Qushayri, *Lata’if*, p. 408.

<sup>21</sup> a typical term of Junayd’s for “body” (conversation with Carl Ernst, November 1998).

And the Teacher [al-Qushayri] said that when God named the human being [*al-insan*] as His servant, He made him a member of the elect (*khawass*). And when He called him, “My servant,” he made him one of the elect of the elect. Then he [al-Qushayri] said, “The direct knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ladunni*) is what is attained by way (*tariq*) of divine inspiration (*ilham*) without intentional effort.”<sup>22</sup> And it is said that [direct knowledge] is the condition (*mimma fihi*) of the uprightness of his servants (*salah ‘ibadihi*), which the Truth taught to His friends (*awliya’ahu*).

The saying of Allah, the Glorified and Exalted [as He went on to say through Moses]:

**May I follow you so that you may teach me of the guidance (*rushd*) you have learned**

**[18.66]**

Moses made his conduct beautiful (*ahsan al-adab*) when he sought permission to follow (*mutaba‘a*). Moses (upon him be peace) knew that the knowledge of Divine Truth has no limit. He yearned for what was beyond his knowledge. He sought the hidden part of it [knowledge] from the places of God’s manifestation (*tajalli*) and the characteristic of His speech (*khitabihi*). That is the most exalted guidance (*rushd*) in as much as when he learned it he knew Divine Truth [*al-Haqq*] within himself (*fi-janibihi*) with a special quality apart from the knowledge of a traveler (*sayyar*) or swimmer in the ocean of His oneness and the fields (*mayadin*) of His predestination (*qadar*), hungry for the knowledge

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<sup>22</sup> cf. al-Qushayri, *Lata’if*, p. 407 (ad. Qur’an 18.65).

of His divinity. There is no harm [in such a pursuit], for Moses did not have that knowledge which Khidr had. Then God, Glorified be He, wanted (*arada*) Moses to know this secret knowledge, the hidden light. So He [God] tested him through companionship with Khidr, in order to straighten the way (*tariq*), to establish the tradition (*sunna*) in following the masters (*masha'ikh*) so that he would be a model (*uswa*) for the aspirants (*muridin*) and for those who seek by serving the masters of the way (*ashyakh al-tariqa*). Moses was more knowledgeable than Khidr in [terms of] what he had received from Divine Truth. But he did not possess what Khidr possessed at that time. [Divine] success (*tawfiq*) helped him and he knew by it the gates of those concealed secrets. Then Moses entered through the door of Khidr's knowledge to the realm of unknown knowledge. Then he reached a station (*maqam*) in which the knowledge of Khidr and the knowledge of all creation became hidden."<sup>23</sup> And this [station] was abundant divine grace (*fadl-Allah*) for Moses.

Faris [Faris Dinawari, a disciple of al-Hallaj] said, "Moses indeed was more knowledgeable than Khidr in [terms of] what he obtained from Allah, but Khidr was more knowledgeable than Moses about the events that happened to Moses." [Faris] also said, "Moses remained constant (*mubaqat*) in his characteristics so that the other could adopt his manner (*adab*)." When someone leaves off (*inqata'a*) from [spiritual] discipline (*riyada*), he is reckoned in terms of the purity (*'isma*) and stability (*tamkin*) that are in

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<sup>23</sup> Two readings may be represented here. The above reading interprets *'ilm* as "knowledge" and the *wa* as a simple conjunction. However, if one reads *'alima* as a verb and *wa* as the introduction of a new sentence, then the alternative reading yields as follows: "...he reached a station (*maqam*) in it where the knowledge of al-Khadir became absent (*ghaba*). He received the knowledge of all creation there."

him. Al-Khidr was annihilated (*faniy<sup>am</sup>*) and consumed (*mustahlak*). One who is consumed (*mustahlak*) does not exercise authority (*hukm*). Moses was made constant in the Truth (*baqiyān bi-'l-Haqq*) but Khidr was annihilated in Truth (*faniyan bi-'l-Haqq*); there is no distinction between these two because they spoke from the same source (*ma'adin wahida*). Then Khidr made excuses and resisted the companionship [*suhba*] of Moses, accusing Moses of being impatient (*sabr*) toward him and of lacking his knowledge. He knew that Moses was the most noble (*akram*) of creation to Allah in his time and that he [Moses] was a boldly stubborn man (*rajul munbasit mu'arbid*). That frightened Khidr from his [Moses's] companionship (*suhba*). He rejected that companionship with his saying:

**Indeed you will not be able to have patience (*sabr*) with me. (18.67a)**

He [Khidr] combined patience with knowledge and then he showed that lack of patience comes from ignorance. Moses was patient and knowledgeable, but [his knowledge was based on] the protection [*hamiya*] of his religion and his religious law (*shari'a*). He did not accept anything that is not in accordance with religious law (*shar'*). This was not [due to] lack of patience nor lack of knowledge, but rather [follows the principle], “Command the good (*al-ma'ruf*) and forbid evil (*al-munkar*),”<sup>24</sup> protecting the limits [set by] Allah. Moses was drowned in the sea of the beauty of Divine Truth and in listening to His [divine] eternal discourse (*kalamihī al-musarmad*) without intermediary, that divine

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<sup>24</sup> cf., e.g., Qur'an, Sura Al 'Imran (3.104); Sura Luqman (31.17), et al.

discourse informed him of the secret of secrets, and of the mysteries of the sciences of Lordship (*ghara'ib 'ulum ar-rububiyya*) and he was finished with the form of outward observances, from quantitative knowledge (*al-'ilm al-muqadir*), which is related to evaluating benefit and harm. So the shaykh [Khidr] knew his [Moses'] condition (*sha'n*): despite his state (*hal*) and his intoxication (*sukr*) in attaining Divine Truth (*al-Haqq*), he would not be able to bear anything not<sup>25</sup> connected to those unveilings (*kushufat*). There is no objection; even if he did not know that knowledge, [however], because indeed the ruler (*sultan*) does not beat one who does not know knowledge of commerce (*tijara*).

Ja'far [as-Sadiq (80-148 A.H./699-765 C.E.)] said, "You will never endure one who is below you (*dunaka*), so how can you be patient with one who is above you?"<sup>26</sup>

And one of them said, "Al-Khidr said to Moses, [p. 593] 'Indeed you will not be able to have patience (*sabr*) with me.' [Qur'an 18.67a] and indeed he was not patient with Khidr [as shown by] his [Khidr's] statement, "This is the parting between me and you." [Qur'an 18.78] He said this to make it known that it is not the role of a saint (*wali*) to impart insight (*yatafarisa*) to a prophet."

Another [al-Qushayri]<sup>27</sup> said, "He [Khidr] distanced himself from him [Moses] so that he would not busy himself in [physical] companionship (*suhba*) at the expense of the

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<sup>25</sup> I suggest that the negation here may be a copyists error. In the context of this work, it would seem that unveiled knowledge challenges Moses' capacities.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Paul Nwyia, "Le tafsir mystique attribue a Ja'far Sadiq," *Melanges de l'Universite Saint Joseph*, XLIII (1962): 181-230.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.



companionship of Divine Truth.” When the matter was determined, he asked for increase on behalf of Moses.”

**He said, ‘You will find me God willing (*in sha’ Allah*) a patient [person]. [18.69]**

Moses acted with courtesy (*adab*) and sought his approval because he knew that patience (*sabr*) is not attained except through Allah.<sup>28</sup>

Faris Dinawari [a disciple of al-Hallaj] said, “Moses sought his approval by saying, ‘...you will find me patient, God willing,’ [Qur’an 18.67c]) but Khidr did not try to get Moses’ approval with his statement, ‘You will not be able to be patient with me.’<sup>29</sup>” He [Faris] said, “The knowledge of Moses at that time was a knowledge attained by effort (*taklif*) and proof (*istidlal*), while the knowledge of Khidr is direct inner knowledge (*‘ilm ladunni*) [extracted] from one unseen [realm] to another unseen [realm].” [Faris] said, “Moses was in the station of cultivation (*maqam al-ta’dib*), while Khidr was firmly established in the station of unveiling and witnessing (*maqam al-kashf wa-’l-mushahada*). When he was made an instructor to [Moses], then Khidr considered Moses to be little in his eyes. He knew [everyone] who was on the face of the earth, but he did not turn away from his station, which is the witnessing (*shuhud*) of what is witnessed (*mashhad*) of the vision of the essence (*ru’ya al-dhat*) and the attributes (*sifat*) toward the destinies that appear in the world of physical forms which are related to the benefits of the

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<sup>28</sup> cf. al-Qushayri, p. 408. This statement is a paraphrase of Qur’an 16.127: “Be patient for your patience is only through God.”

creation.” This was due to his [Khidr’s] exalted status with God and the greatness of his knowledge of the divine characteristics (*na‘at*) and attributes (*sifat*).<sup>30</sup> So he confirmed the matter, saying:

**“If you would follow me, then do not ask me about anything until I mention (*dhikr*) it to you.” (18.70)**

He deflected his question [“May I follow...” 18.66], for the truthful one (*sadiq*) should know the actual situation (*waqi‘a*). As he is experienced (*mutahaqqaq<sup>am</sup>*), he explains to [Khidr] what he seeks by his truthfulness and sincerity. But Moses does not need this question, and it is the duty of discipleship to remain still during the spiritual exchange (*tasarruf*) with the teacher.

Al-Husri [Abu-'l-Hasan ‘Ali b. ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Fihri (420/1029-488/1095)] said Khidr knew the insufficiencies (*qusur*) of [Moses’] knowledge from the nature of Moses’s questioning and indeed [Moses] asked him [urgently] for cultivation (*ta’dib*), not for instruction (*ta’lim*). So [Khidr] said to [Moses], “If you follow me, don’t ask me concerning anything,’ [i.e.,] because your knowledge [i.e., prophethood] is higher and more complete and indeed you sought me for cultivation (*ta’dib*), not for instruction (*ta’lim*) in an exceptional (*khass*) state.

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<sup>29</sup> Qur’an Sura al-Kahf 18.67; these words are repeated in. 18.72, 75; this thought is rephrased in 18.78, 82

<sup>30</sup> See the related discussion on p. 591, s.v. 18.65b.

His Statement may He be Exalted:

**They sought food from its people, but they refused them hospitality. (18.77b)**

They traveled by the path of asking (*su'al*), which is connected to reducing the lower self (*nafs*) in the path (*tariqa*) and when “they refused them hospitality” they descended from a station (*maqam*) of asking to acquiring (*kasb*). Acquiring (*kasb*) is one of the characteristics of [sober] travelers (*salikin*) and the asking is one of the characteristics of the intoxicated (*majdhubin*) who are not able to work for a living (*makasib*) or to waste their breath (*anfas*) in being busy with acquisition. Rather they ask only for what they need to sustain themselves for the moment (*bi-lahzatin*) and they free themselves (*yafraghuna*) of this [asking] in a moment. The way of asking in reality (*haqiqa*) is for stability. If the one who is asked is present, it is God, the Great and Majestic. The asking is an indication of weakness. When the state (*hal*) becomes perfect, both asking (*su'al*) and acquisition (*maksab*) are abandoned. In [this] it is clear that asking and acquisition do not prevent the gnostic (*al-'arif*) from attaining the station (*maqam*) of divine satisfaction (*rida*) and trust (*tawakkul*), since despite their exalted status (*qadar*), they [the travelers] still ask and take, and they were in a state of trust (*tawakkul*) and divine satisfaction (*rida*), in the best of [spiritual] states.

Al-Wasiti [Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Wasiti, d. 932] said: “ ‘...they refused to give them hospitality’ [Qur’an 18.77b] [means that] Khidr witnessed (*shahid*) the lights of the kingdom, and Moses witnessed the intermediaries (*wasa'it*).’ ” Al-Khidr informed Moses that asking from humanity (*nas*) is [really] asking from Allah, so [Khidr said] do not be

angry if you are refused because the one who refuses (*al-mani`*) and the giver (*al-mu`ti*) are one (*ahad*). Therefore do not look at the causes (*asbab*), but look at the Cause (*Musabbib*). This is an explanation (*tashrih*) of the inner voices (*hawajis*) of the soul (*nafs*).

When Khidr raised up the wall, and rejected (*taraka*) the reward of his deeds, Moses said:

**If you had wished (*shi'ta*) you could have taken a reward for it. [18.77c]**

Moses did not strive after a reward for the deed but found the people of the village blaming and stingy. He wanted to take a reward for the deed to have it contributed as charity (*yatasaddaqaha*) [p. 594] for two reasons: [one,] to craft an example to the eyes of the stingy to punish them in this way. He [Moses] said (peace upon him) concerning this village, "This is the village of blame." [and secondly,] he said the food of the stingy is a punishment and it may be that he wanted to take the reward so the prophets could eat. Thus could God forgive the people of the village their sins and make them generous in their blessing of them. Moses was in the station (*maqam*) of well-being and intimacy (*rafahiya wa'l-uns*), and he was injured by striving (*mujahada*). And afterwards it was Khidr who stayed (*baqiy*) in the stations of the way (*manazil al-tariqa*) and Moses who was in the ocean of the fires of longing (*bahr niran al-ishtiyaq*). He showed no patience concerning the food (for this is [an indication of] the state of the people who reached the goal) and he was -- peace upon him -- at the beginning stage. In the station of hearing (*maqam al-sama`*) and witnessing, he had been patient concerning food and drink for forty days. Our

Prophet [Muhammad] -- Blessings of God and Peace be upon him – in the ascension (*mi'raj*) narrated that he was hungry at that time, and this was due to his state (*sawlat al-hal*). It was the inclination of Khidr to forego the reward for the deeds and this was one of the habits of the chivalrous (*da'ba al-fityan*).

Ibn 'Ata said, "Vision of the act (*ru'ya al-'amal*)<sup>31</sup> and seeking reward from it nullify the act." Have you not seen that when al-Kalim [the one to whom God spoke, i.e., Moses] said to Khidr, "If you wanted you could have taken a reward,' [18.77] he separated from him?

[Abu 'l-Qasim Muhammad] al-Junayd [d. 910] said, "when the oppressiveness (*zulm*) of greed falls upon the hearts, the souls (*nufus*) are veiled from their shares of them [hearts] in the inner aspects of the decree. When the knowledge of Khidr reached its perfection, and Moses knew his value (*sha'nahu*) and the limit (*hadd*) of his knowledge, he was at the point of overtaking Khidr by asking him the secrets of the [types of] knowledge of the lordship of [both] the attributes and the essence (*asrar al-'ulum ar-rabbaniya as-sifatiyya adh-dhatiya*). Al-Khidr knew that he by himself was not able to answer him concerning what Khidr refused him, and therefore he finished with him. He justified himself by saying:

**He said, 'This is the parting (*firaq*) between me and you. [18.78]**

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<sup>31</sup> i.e., consciousness

Al-Khidr knew the inner sense (*sirr*) of Moses and his intimacy with the beauty of Divine Truth (*unsahu bi-jamal al-haqq*) and [knew] that he [Moses] was being tested in his companionship (*suhbatih*), so he wanted to divert him [Moses] from the form of knowledge and action (*surat al-'ilm wa-'l-'amal*). He also knew his severity (*hiddatahu*), so he feared the answer to his asking which [was] from the realm of the secret of the secret of the exalted [realm of] lordship (*ar-rububiyat al-'aliya*), fearing that he [Moses] might act presumptuously with one of the masters [of this] narrative (*qissa*). How could he not dispense with him, knowing his blow which took away the eye of 'Azra'il<sup>32</sup> [the angel of death], on whom be peace.

[Abu'l-Qasim Ibrahim al-] Nasrabadi [d. 367/977-8] said, "When Khidr knew the limit (*intiha'*) of his [own] knowledge and Moses' attainment (*bulugh*) of the extent (*muntaha*) of [spiritual] formation (*ta'addub*), he said, 'This is the parting (*firaq*) between me and you,' lest Moses might still ask him after [all this] about a knowledge or a state [which he might lack] and he would be embarrassed."

And Abu Bakr ibn Tahir [Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn Ishaq ibn Tahir (d. 1119)] said, "Moses forbade Khidr against doing what is prohibited (*manakir*) in the outer realm (*zahir*) and even if Khidr had had knowledge of it, it was by the outer form of the knowledge that Moses commanded him. And when he forbade him against doing the good

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<sup>32</sup> "The angel of death was sent to Moses and when he went to him, Moses slapped him severely, spoiling one of his eyes. The angel went back to his Lord and said, 'You sent me to a servant who does not want to die.' God restored his eye and said, 'Go back and tell him (i.e., Moses) to place his hand over the back of an ox, for he will be allowed to live the number of years equal to the number of hairs coming under his hand..." *Sahih Bukhari* Vol. II, Bk. 23, #423

(*ma'ruf*)<sup>33</sup> in his saying, “If you wanted you could have taken a reward,” he attributed this to greed. [Then] he said, “This is the parting (*firaq*) between me and you.”

[Next follows] the Exalted’s saying:

**As for the youth, his parents were believers (*mu'minain*) and we feared that he would grieve them with rebellion (*tughyan*) and disbelief (*kufr*). [18.80]**

I was amazed concerning this matter since indeed Allah, Glorified be He, in pre-eternity (*azal*) knew about this, and was able to create him [the youth] as a believer, to avoid imprinting upon his heart disbelief (*kufr*) so that his parents would not be disbelievers because of him. But His pre-eternal wisdom flows beyond the awareness of those who understand (*idrak afham al-fuhama'*). He did not need to kill the youth without sin (*jarm*), rather He could have guided him to the way of truth (*tariq al-haqq*) so that the oppressiveness of disbelief (*zulmat al-kufr*) would cover neither him, nor his parents. Allah does what He wills and He commands what He wants.

In the explicit meaning of the verse it is as if it reveals (*tunabbi'u*) that acquisition (*iktisab*) by the human being (*bashar*) interferes with the destiny (*qadar*) [just as] Khidr’s killing of the youth prevents his parents from succumbing to disbelief (*kufr*). The issue is greater than anyone imagines, because that insight describes “essential union” (*'ayn al-jam'*)<sup>34</sup> in the world. Al-Khidr was the act of Allah, the youth was the act of Allah, the

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<sup>33</sup> cf. fn. 12 above.

<sup>34</sup> '*Ayn al-jam'* is a Hallajian term of great importance to Ruzbihan who uses it to explain the basis of ecstatic utterance (*shath*). Junayd also employed the term to describe the state of Bayazid. (cf.

slaying was the act of Allah, the command was the command of Allah, [p 595] and the destiny (*qadar*) was the destiny (*qadar*) of Allah.

From the perspective of destiny (*qadar*) God establishes it, but from the perspective of the action (*fi'l*), He deletes what He decreed. Allah deletes what He wishes from what He decreed (*qaddara*) in pre-eternity (*azal*), by a destiny (*qadar*) which preceded that [previous] decree (*qadar*). It is the knowledge of the knowledge, the unseen of the unseen, the secret of the secret, and the command of the command. He establishes that destiny (*qadar*) as [He] wills which does not precede the ultimate destiny (*qadar al-qadar*), and it is one in all aspects (*wujuh*). The cause emanates from the one who causes (*musabbib*) and [both] the cause and the one who causes “essential union” (*'ayn al-jam'*) are one.

Hence Khidr was looking at the outer destiny (*al-qadar al-zahir*), and Moses was looking at the ultimate destiny (*qadar al-qadar*). Moses argued with Khidr over the point that destiny (*qadar*) precedes the abiding of both the faith of the parents and the [abiding] faith of the one killed simultaneously. Even if the killing had not occurred, Khidr argued with Moses that the killing of the youth was also destined (*maqdar*) from the pre-eternity of pre-eternity (*azal al-azal*), and in its essence it was an act of Allah (*fi'l Allah*)

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Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* [Albany: SUNY, 1985], 17, 27, 37, 93.) '*Ayn al-Jam'* involves an achievement of primordial unity and non-duality in which the individual self does not project itself as a separate other against the exclusive existence of God. Ruzbihan describes Hallaj in the state of '*ayn al-jam'*': "...He was drowned in the limitless ocean of eternity, pure ecstasy overcame him. He entered into that sea with the quality of creaturehood, and he departed with the character of lordship. From the depths of that ocean he brought forth the pearls of everlastingness..." Ruzbihan, *Sharh*, p. 45, quoted in Ernst, *ibid.*, p. 17. The motif of the ocean or sea as a metaphor for eternity is used by al-Qashani, *Tafsir*, p. 772.



proceeding directly (*mubashir<sup>am</sup>*) from the command of Allah. When his knowledge of destiny (*qadar*) exceeded the knowledge of Moses, he said “This is the parting (*firaq*) between me and you.”

And I suspect in this [matter] that the youth had the most beautiful face, and there was in him a light [shining] from the garment (*kiswa*) of God’s beauty and that Khidr was afraid that the people of divine truth (*al-haqq*) and His knowledge (*ma’rafa*) would look upon him and become intimate<sup>35</sup> with the light of Allah that they find in him, and they would be stopped from gazing upon Allah by intermediaries. He killed [in him] what was other than Allah in him and removed the intermediaries from between him and His lovers (*ahibba*’), [His] prophets, and His friends (*awliya*’). Someone said, “Al-Khidr discerned (*tafarrasa*) in the youth what his destiny led him to from disbelief (*kufra*). One who discerns (*tafarisa*) by the light of Allah cannot be wrong. [Next follows] the Statement of the Exalted:

**...So I intended (*fa-aradtu*) to render it useless (*a’ibaha*) [18.79]...**

**and His Statement: So We intended (*fa-aradna*) that their Lord would substitute [one] better in purity and nearer in compassion (*ruhma*). [18.80]**

**and His Statement: So your Lord intended... (*fa-arada Rabbuka*) [18.82]**

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<sup>35</sup> For this term and its connection with beautiful faces, see Carl Ernst, “Ruzbihan Baqli on Love as ‘Essential Desire’ ” in Alma Giesen, ed. *God is Beautiful and Loves Beauty* (Festschrift in honor of Annemarie Schimmel) (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994) 181- 189. Ruzbihan was the chief transmitter of a version of a saying which he attributes to Dhu’l-Nun al-Misri (d. 859): “Whoever becomes an intimate of God (*ista’nasa billah*) becomes intimate with every beautiful thing (*shay malih*), every fair

These [three] intentions (*iradat*) seem to be different in their form (*suratiha*) but in truth are [only] one, because the intention (*irada*) in reality (*haqiqa*) is the intention of Allah as the intentions emerge in many aspects [to express] the single intention of Allah. So His saying “So I intended...” is a reference to “essential union” (‘*ayn al-jam*’) and unification (*ittihad*). And His Statement “We intended...” is a reference to assimilating the divine attributes (*ittisaf*) and expansiveness (*inhisat*). And His Statement “So your Lord intended...” is a reference to “the isolation of the eternal from the temporal (*ifrad al-qidam ‘an al-huduth*),”<sup>36</sup> the disappearance (*talashi*) and annihilation (*fana*) of the one professing unity (*muwahhid*) in the one unified (*muwahhad*).<sup>37</sup> This [last] intention (*irada*) describes the inner state (*batin*) of will (*mashi’a*). And the inner state (*batin*) of will (*mashiya*) is the hidden aspect of the attribute which is the secret of the essence (*dhat*). And the essence is the hidden aspect of all hiddenness. When one moves away from the depiction of unity, jealousy of pure oneness restricts him to essential union (‘*ayn al-jam*’); when he moves away from union it restricts him to merely assimilating the divine attributes (*ittisaf*) and to expansiveness (*inhisat*). Then it drowns him in the sea of divinity (*ilahiya*) and it annihilates (*afna*) him in its depths from all vision (*ru’ya*), knowledge, will, action, and intimation. Through his action God (*al-haqq*) spoke in the first [intention]

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face (*wajh sahib*), every pretty voice (*sawt tayyib*), and every sweet fragrance (*ra’iha tayyiba*.” *ibid.*, 184.

<sup>36</sup> This is Junayd’s formulation of *tawhid*: “Unification (*tawhid*) is the isolation of the eternal from the temporal.” Quoted in Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the definition of *tawhid* by Abu Muhammad al-Ruwaym (d. 303/915): “*Tawhid* is the effacement of the characteristics of humanity and the stripping bare of divinity.” (quoted in Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, p. 29.

and in the second [intention] and in the third [intention]. Only Allah exists among [these expressions of intention].

Ibn ‘Ata’ said, “When Khidr said, ‘So I intended...,’ he was inspired within [his] inner sense (*sirr*) [with the question], ‘Who are you, that you presume to express your own intention?’ He said in the second case, ‘We intend...’ [indicating that] he was inspired within the inner sense [with the question], ‘Who are you and Moses, that you both presume to express an intention?’ Thus he went back [i.e., retracted his statement] and hence he said, ‘So your Lord intended...’ ”

And he [Ibn ‘Ata’] said about his statement, “So I intended...” it is compassion (*shafaqa*) upon creation (*khalq*); and his statement “We intended...” [is] a mercy (*rahma*); and his statement “So your Lord intended...” [is] a return to reality (*haqiqa*).

Husayn [al-Hallaj] said in reference to his statement[s], “So I intended...” [and] “We intended...” [and] “Your Lord [intended] ...” -- the first station (*al-maqam al-awwal*) is God’s ravishing [of the individual ego] (*istila’ al-haqq*) and the second station is discoursing with the servant, and the third station is a return to the inner [esoteric] through the outer [exoteric].” The inwardness of the inwardness becomes within it the outer of the outer. And the absence of the absence becomes the visible (*‘iyan*) of the visible. And the visible (*‘iyan*) of the visible becomes the absence of the absence; just as nearness to

something through the lower selves (*nufus*) is distance, so the nearness<sup>38</sup> to it in itself is [true] nearness to God...

*‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (d. 730 A.H./ 1329 C.E.), Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim*<sup>39</sup>

[p. 766] **“And when Moses said to his servant (*fata*), ‘I will not cease until I reach the meeting of the two seas or I will continue for ages.’ And when they reached the meeting between them, they forgot their fish and it took its way into the sea [through] an opening. And when they had passed on, he [Moses] said to his servant, ‘Give us our meal; we have encountered on our journey [at] this [point] fatigue.’ He [the servant] said, ‘Did you see when we came to the rock, indeed I forgot the fish and it was only Satan that caused me to forget to mention that it took its way into the sea wonderously” [18.60]**

Its apparent meaning (*zahir*) is what was mentioned in the story. The miracles are undeniable. And as for its inner meaning (*batin*), indeed it is said: ‘And when the Moses of the heart (*qalb*) said to the servant of the soul (*nafs*) at the time of its attachment to the body: **“I will not cease...”** (18.60) This means I will not stop my

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<sup>38</sup> Carl Ernst has proposed a copyist’s error here in which the manuscript’s reading of “*qurb*” (near) should be replaced with “*ba’d*” (distance). This substitution allows a parallelism which reads: “So the distance from something through them [the lower selves (*nufus*)] is [true] nearness to God...” (Carl Ernst, personal conversation, November 2, 1998)

<sup>39</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (attributed to Muhyi al-Din ibn ‘Arabi), *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim*, ed. Mustafa Ghalib (2 vols.; Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 766-773.

walking or traveling or I will still walk “...until I reach the meeting of the two seas...” (18.60) This means the encounter of the two worlds: the world of spirit (*ruh*) and the world of the body. And they are the sweet and the salty [water] in the form (*sura*) of humanity and the station of the heart. “...or I will continue on for ages.” This means ‘I will travel for a long period.’

“and when they reached the meeting between [the two of] them” In the present united form [i.e., the spirit and body conjoined] “They forgot their fish” It is the [same species of] fish which swallowed Dhu-’l Nun (Yunus), upon him be peace – the same in type, not specifically. [They forgot] because their food, before arriving at this form [i.e., of the spirit and body conjoined] was the external fish which he commanded as provision for the journey at the time of resolving [to make that journey]. “And it took its way” into the sea of the body, alive as it was at first. “through an opening (*sarab<sup>an</sup>*)” [into] a wide hole, as it is said, ‘Its path in the sea remained open; the sea did not close upon it. “And when they had passed on” a place where they separated from the fish, and Moses was burdened with fatigue and hunger. [p. 767] He did not become fatigued during the journey and he had not been hungry before that, according to what has been narrated: he remembered the fish and the sustenance from it.<sup>40</sup> And he asked his servant for food and he said: “Give us our meal..” because this state of his was like daylight in relation to what preceded it in the womb [*rahim* ] “We have

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Hadith Bukhari 4.55.23.613.

**encountered on our journey [at] this [point] fatigue.”** [This is] the fatigue of giving birth and its difficulty. **“He said, ‘Did you see...’ ”** what had exposed me **“...when we came to the rock...”** That is the upper chest for the suckling. **“...And indeed I forgot the fish...”** Because we did not need it [self-sufficiency]. **“What made us forget it is Satan.”** This means “Nothing made me forget except Satan”: Upon substitution, this means it is consciousness (*damir*). And this is because Moses was asleep when the fish took its way to the sea, based on what they say.<sup>41</sup> But the servant (*fata*) who is the soul (*nafs*) was awake. So the Satan made insinuations (*wahm* ). The one who made the tree look beautiful to Adam mentioned to the soul (*nafs*) the fish for Moses. It was a state, a state of bewilderment and the way which struck awe in him was the opening (*sarab* ) mentioned [previously].

**“He said, ‘This is what we were seeking. So they went back over their footsteps retracing [them]. And they found a servant from among Our servants. We gave him mercy (*rahma*) from Us. And We taught him knowledge from Our Presence. Moses said to him, ‘May I follow you so that you may teach me of what you have learned of guidance (*rushd*). He (Khidr) said, ‘Indeed, you will not be able to have patience with me. How can you be patient concerning what your understanding (*khubr*) does not encompass? He [Moses] said, “You will find me, God willing (*in sha’ Allah*) a patient [person] and I will not disobey you in [any]**

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<sup>41</sup> Bukhari narrates that Moses slept (4.55.23.613).

**matter. He [Khidr] said, ‘If you would follow me, then do not ask me about anything until I mention (*dhikr*) it to you.’ So they proceeded until when they rode in the boat, he broke it. He [Moses] said, ‘Did you intend to drown its people? You have done a strange thing. He [Khidr] answered, “Did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me?” He [Moses] said, ‘Don’t blame me that I forgot and don’t grieve me with difficulty.’ ” (18.64-72)**

[768] **“He said ‘That [was what we were seeking]’ ”** (18.64a) that is, the escaping of the fish and its taking its way according to its nature. **“What we were...”** seeking, since here was the meeting of the two seas (*majma‘ al-bahrain*) of which Moses was informed that at it he would find someone more knowledgeable than he. For the ascent (*taraqiyy*) to perfection is through the pursuit of sacred intellect (*al-‘aql al-qudsi*) It can only happen in this station (*maqam*). **“And they retraced their steps”** in rising to the station of the original nature (*fitra al-ula*) as they were initially.

They followed the steps [*qasas*] which means they followed their footprints upon descending in rising to perfection until they found the sacred intellect (*al-‘aql al-qudsi*). He is the ‘servant from among God’s servants,’ specially selected with the virtue of caring (*‘inayat*) and mercy (*rahma*). **“And we gave him mercy (*rahma*) from ourselves”** that is, it is a spiritual perfection (*kamalan ma‘nawiyyan*) free of material things; it is sacred without parts, and is pure light (*nuriyya mahda*) all which are the signs (*athar*) of closeness and intimacy (*‘indiyya*). **“And We taught him**

**knowledge from Our Presence,”** (18.65) that is, of sacred knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and the realization of complete inner knowledge without mediation of human teaching (*ta'lim bashari*).

And His statement **“May I follow you”** (18.66) It is the explicit display of the intention to journey [*suluk*] and rising to perfection. **“Indeed you will not be able to have patience with me,”** for your being is not aware [*matla'*] of hidden matters [*al-umur al-ghaybiyya*] nor spiritual realities (*haqa'iq ma'nawiyya*) because of your lack of freedom and your being veiled by the body (*bi-'l badn*) and its coverings. So you will not be able to withstand my friendship [*murafiqati*]. And this is the meaning of his statement **“How will you be patient concerning what your knowledge (*khubr*) does not encompass?”** He [Moses] said, **“You will find me, God willing, patient.”** Due to the power of my preparation and my perseverance on the quest. **“And I will not disobey you in anything,”** due to my directing myself toward you and due to my accepting your command due to my purity and sincerity of my intention. All of the dialogues are in the language of a [spiritual] state [*hal*]. **“If you would follow me”** in traveling the path of perfection (*suluk tariq al-kamal*) **“So do not ask anything of me.”** That is, emulation (*iqtida'*) is incumbent upon you and following in the way of deeds and [spiritual] training (*riyada*) [769] and ethics (*akhlaq*) and efforts (*mujahadat*). Do not seek realities and meanings. **“until”** the time comes that **“I make mention of it to you,”** that is, from that knowledge, **“a mention [or, remembrance]**



**(dhikr)**” and I inform you of the unseen realities upon your freeing yourself (*tajarrud-ka*) through works of transformation and heartfulness (*bi-l-mu‘amalat al-qa‘labiyya wa-l-qalbiya*).

“**So they proceeded until when they rode...**” in the boat of the body, the vehicle [*al-baligh*] to the farthest extent of spiritual training (*riyada*), the righteous one for servanthood, to the sacred realm in a sea of primordial matter (*hayula*; Gk: *hyle*)<sup>42</sup> on the journey toward Allah, breaking it [the boat of the body] through training and eating less and weakening its jurisdiction, causing a crack in its structure and weakening it. [*awhanaha*]. “**So he said: Did you break it to drown its people?**” that is did you break it so you will drown its animal nature and vegetable nature which is in it and [drown them] in the sea of primordial matter (*hayula*) and thus destroy [them]. “**You have done a strange thing.**” And this is the denial (*inkar*), tantamount to the manifestation of the ego (*nafs*) in its attributes and the inclination of the heart to it, the irritation of the deprivation of fortune in training, and the lack of satisfaction in possessions. “**And he said: Did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me?**” -- a spiritual warning and a sacred caution for resolution [*‘azima*] in journey needs to be stronger than that. “**He said: ‘Do not blame me that I forgot...**” (to the end [of the *aya*]) [This is] an excuse from the station [*maqam*] of the blaming soul (*al-nafs al-lawwama*).

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<sup>42</sup> *Hayula* is a Greek loan word translated in Latin as *prima materia*.

**“And they journeyed until they encountered a youth and he [Khidr] killed him. He [Moses] said, ‘Did you kill an pure soul [who had not slain] another soul? Truly you have done a reprehensible thing.’ He [Khidr] said, ‘Did I not tell you that you would not be able to have patience with me?’ He [Moses] said, “If I ask you about anything after this, then don’t keep company with me. You have received from me an excuse.’ So they proceeded until when they came to the people of the village. They sought food from its people, but they refused them hospitality. And they found in it [the village] a wall verging toward (*yuridu*) destruction and he raised it up. He [Moses] said, ‘If you had wished you could have taken a reward for it.’ He [Khidr] answered, ‘This is the parting between me and you. But I will tell you the ultimate meaning (*ta’wil*) of what you did not have the patience to bear.’ ” [18.74-78]**

[p. 770] **“And they journeyed till they encountered a youth”** He is the ego (*nafs*) which is manifested through its attributes and veils the heart. It commands to do evil. He killed him by suppressing wrath and desire and all its attributes. **“Did you kill a pure soul...?”** This is an objection to [by?] an [overly] compassionate heart (*li-tahannun al-qalb*) toward the ego and **“Did I not tell you...”** is a reminder (*tadhkir*) and spiritual expression (*ta’bir ruhi*). **“If I ask you anything...”** (to the end of the *aya*) It is an excuse, a confirmation (*iqrar*) of sin (*dhanb*), and a recognition, all of which are from the transformations (*talwinat*) [at the stage] of being a blaming soul (*al-*

*nafs al-lawwama*). “**And they continued until they came to the people of the village**” They are the bodily powers and they [the two] sought food from them [the people of the village]. That is the request for spiritual food from them, that is, through them. This is like extracting the universal meaning (*al-ma’ani al-kulliya*) from partial cognitions of it (*juzi’yat*)<sup>43</sup>. And indeed they [the people of the village] refused to provide hospitality and to provide them food before this. For their meal at that time was from above them, from the sacred lights and [from] the manifestations in their beauty and majesty [from] the divine gnosis (*al-m’a’arif al-ilahiya*), and the unseen meanings. It [their desired food] was no longer under their feet as it was before breaking the boat and killing the youth [were accomplished] through spiritual training. All the [bodily] power and the senses (*al-hawas*) were an obstacle to that, not a support. On the contrary, one is not ready until they are quieted down and [until] one directs them, just as Moses said to his people, “Stay [here].” (*Amkuthu.*)”<sup>44</sup>

The wall which “**was verging toward (*yuridu*) destruction**” is *al-nafs al-mutma’inna* (the soul of contentment), but He designates it as “the wall” because it happened after killing *al-nafs al-ammara* (the commanding soul) and its death through spiritual training, so it became solid, without movement in its soul (*nafs*) nor in its will. Due to the intensity of its weakness, it almost dies. He thus designates its state through the

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. s.v. 18.82, near the end of p. 772 where universals and particulars are discussed more explicitly. Also see s.v. 18.78, near the end of p. 771 where gnosis is described as exceeding discursive limits.

<sup>44</sup> Qur’an Sura Ta Ha (20.10) Moses utters this command to his people before he approaches the fire where he hears God address him and confer the divine commission.

will to demolish it and to build it with it [the soul of contentment] straightening it (*iqamatihī*) with created perfections and beautiful virtues in the light of the power of speech (*al-natiqiya*) until the virtues (*fada'il*) undertook the station of their attributes instead of vices.

[p. 771] And [as for] the statement of Moses, upon whom be peace, Moses said: **“If you had wished, you could have taken a reward.”** (18.77), [It means] the transformation of the heart, not [the transformation] of the soul (*nafs*). He [Moses] sought the reward and recompense [*thawab*] through acquiring virtues and by the work of [spiritual] training [*riyada*]. And for this reason he [Khidr] answered him [Moses] with his statement: **“This is the parting between me and you.”** (18.78), that is, this is the separation between my station (*maqam*) and your station (*maqam*), and their contradictions and the difference between my state (*hal*) and your state.

And indeed the building up of the soul (*nafs*) through training and the cultivation (*takhalluq*) of praiseworthy ethical behavior (*akhlaq*) are not for the expectation of a reward and recompense. Otherwise, then they would be neither virtues nor perfections, because virtue is the cultivation of divine ethics (*al-takhliq bi-l-akhlaq al-ilahiyya*) from whence the desired actions proceed from their owner for their own sake, not for an [interested] motive. That which is done for a motive is a veil (*hijab*) and a vice (*radhila*), not a virtue. And the goal is removing the veil, the unveiling (*inkishaf*) of the covering of the characteristics of the soul (*nafs*), and the exposure to the realm of

light in order to receive (*talaqiyya*) hidden meanings (*al-ma'ani al-ghaybiyya*).

Moreover, [the goal is] to be characterized with the Divine Attributes, It is also coming to reality in God after passing away in God [*fana fi-hi*], not for the recompense as you have alleged.

**“Now I will tell you the ultimate meaning (*ta'wil*) of what you did not have the patience to bear.”** (18.78), that is, when the soul (*nafs*) is contented [*itma'inat*] and the [bodily] powers come to rest, then you are able to accept the meanings and you will meet [*talqiya*] the Unseen about which I have forbidden you to ask **“...until I mention it to you.”** (18.70) And I will mention it to you and tell you through interpretation of the deepest meaning (*ta'wil*) these matters if you are ready to receive the meanings and the forms of *gnosis*.

**“As for the boat, it belonged to poor people who worked on the sea and I wanted (*aradtu*) to make it useless, for there followed them a king who took every boat by force. As for the youth, his parents were believers (*mu'minain*) and we feared that he would oppress them with rebellion and disbelief. So we desired (*aradna*) that their Lord would give them one better in purity and closer in mercy.”**

(18.79-81)

[p. 772] **“As for the boat it belonged to poor people”** (18.79) in the sea of primordial matter, that is, the bodily powers of the external senses and the natural vegetative powers. However, God has named them “poor ones” (*masakin*) because of the endurance of their passivity (*sakun*), their clinging to the dust of the body, their being too weak to oppose the heart on the journey, and their dominating of it [the *qalb*] like all the animal powers. It is related: “Indeed they were ten brothers, five of them temporal (*zamani*) and five worked in the sea [of eternity].” This is an allusion to the senses, external (*al-zahira*) and internal (*al-batina*)<sup>45</sup> **“And I wanted to break it”** in training so that the king, the commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammara*) would not take it by force. He is the King who was behind them, that is, before them. **“He took every boat by force”** in seeking the ravishing (*bi-l-istila'*) of them and the use of them in his passions and his wishes. **“As for the youth, his two parents...”** who are the spirit (*ruh*) and the bodily nature **“were believers”** established in belief in God’s unity (*tawhid*), to their compliance to the profession of obedience to Allah, their following (*imtithal*) the command of Allah, and their submission to what Allah wants of them. **“And we feared he would grieve them,”** that is, he covered them with a deluge upon them, by his appearance (*bi-zuhurihi*) in “I-ness” (*bi 'l- ana 'iyya*) upon

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<sup>45</sup> This is an allusion to the Avicennan model of the faculties of the soul. External senses are the five physical senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The five internal senses are these: (1) common sense (*al-hiss al-mushtarak*) also called fantasy (*bantasiya*); (2) retentive imagination (*khayal*) also called representation (*musawwira*); compositive imagination (*mutakhayyila* or *mukhayyila*); estimative faculty (*wahm*); and memory, or the preservative (*hafiza*) or recollective (*dhakira*, *mutadhakkira*) faculty. See Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992, p. 62-63.

the witness of the spirit (*ruh*) **“and an unbeliever”** to their graces (*ni'mat*) with his recalcitrance and his evil actions or a coverer in veiling, so he would corrupt them, themselves and their religion. And he would abolish their worship of God.<sup>46</sup> **“And we desired that their Lord would substitute one better than him in purity [*zakat* ]”** just as He substituted for them the soul of contentment (*nafs mutma'inna*), which is better than him in purity (*zakat*), that is ritual purity (*tahara*) and cleanliness (*naqa'*) **“and closer in mercy (*rahma*)”** extending compassion (*ta'tifa*) and **“mercy (*rahma*)”** since its existence is more compassionate (*a'tafu*) upon the spirit and the body, more useful to them, more sympathetic (*shafaqa*) and it [the soul of contentment (*nafs al-mutma'inna*)] is permitted to be the desired object (*murad*) for the two fathers: the grandfather (*al-jadd*) and the father. It is an allusion to the spirit (*ruh*) and the heart (*qalb*), and his being closer in mercy (*rahma*), more appropriate to them and stronger in compassion.

**“And as for the wall, it belonged to two youths. They were orphans in the town and under it was a treasure belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man (*salih*). So your Lord desired that they reach their maturity and take out their treasure – a mercy from your Lord. And I did not do it by my own command. That is the ultimate meaning (*ta'wil*) of what you could not practice patience towards. (18.82)**

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<sup>46</sup> Ruzbihan adopts and expands this idea that the youth's beauty worked as a barrier against the worship of God. Cf. Ruzbihan, *'Ara'is*, p. 772, e.g.: “...[T]he youth had the most beautiful face...al-Khadir was afraid...they would be stopped from gazing upon Allah by intermediaries.”

**“And as for the wall, it belonged to two youths. They were orphans in the town.”**

These are the two states of mind: the theoretical (*nazariya*) and the active (*'amaliya*). Their severance from their father, who is the holy spirit (*al-ruh al-qudus*) [is] their concealment from it in bodily adornment (*bi-'l-ghawashi al-badaniyya*) or the heart which dies or is killed when the soul (*nafs*) is completely overpowered in the city of the body. **“And underneath it was a treasure belonging to them.”** That is to say, the treasure is gnosis (*ma'rifa*)<sup>47</sup> which is not learned except in the station of the heart (*maqam al-qalb*) bringing about the combination of universals (*kulliyat*) and particulars (*juzi'yat*) when it (the heart) is perfected.<sup>48</sup> This is the state (*hal*) of the strongest who persevere and seek to extract this treasure. And some of the literalistic exegetes (*ahl al-zahir min al-mufassirin*) say this treasure is a text containing knowledge (*'ilm*). **“And the father of the two of them had been...”** refers to the two interpretations (*ta'wilain*). **“One who is righteous (*salih*)”** It is said, the father is higher than both of them. God has preserved them for him. Indeed this is nothing other than the holy spirit (*ruh al-quds*).

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<sup>47</sup> Al-Tabari transmits the interpretation that the treasure is knowledge (*'ilm*) either written on pages (*suhuf*) or inscribed on a gold tablet (*lawh min al-dhahab*) [al-Tabari, *Jami'a al-bayan* sections 23255-23266]. The majority consensus interprets the treasure as knowledge (*'ilm*) in one form or another.



The above translations represent the sections of three Sufi tafsirs which discuss the story of Khidr and Moses. In the next chapter, we will consider the historical context behind and intertextual relationships among these works.

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<sup>48</sup> See s.v. 18.77, p. 770 where the topic of universals and particulars is first raised. Also see ad. 18.78 and 18.70, p. 770 where gnosis is described as exceeding discursive limits.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### INTERTEXTUALITY AMONG SUFI TAFSIRS: COMPANIONSHIP, TRAINING, AND KNOWLEDGE IN SUFI READINGS OF THE STORY OF MOSES' JOURNEY WITH KHIDR

As we have seen, al-Tabari, in his tafsir identified a number of Khidr's characteristics which associate him with the role of a teacher or guide (*murshid*). Al-Tabari also described Khidr's knowledge as the knowledge of the unseen (*'ilm al-ghayb*). The discussion in this chapter addresses the question of how Sufi exegetes read the story of Khidr and Moses: What features of the story of Khidr and Moses evoked responses from Sufi commentators? How did the story either reflect or shape their own mystical experiences? And how did they apply the story to the practice of Sufism?

This chapter provides a summary, correlation, and analysis of the sections of three significant Sufi Qur'an commentaries which treat the narrative of Moses and his spiritual guide (*sahib Moses*) Khidr, "the Green One" (Qur'an 18.60-82):

Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Lata'if al-isharat*, ed. Ibrahim Basyuni (6 vols.; Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1968-71). Vol 2, pp. 406-412.

Ruzbihan b. Abi Nasr al-Fasa'i al-Daylami al-Baqli al-Shirazi, Sadr al-Din Abu Muhammad, *'Ara'is al-bayan fi haqa'iq al-qur'an / The Brides of Explanation on the Realities of the Qur'an*. Cawnpore (1285/1868-9) Calcutta 1300/1883; Karachi (1310/1892-3) (Arabic Lithographs) Lithograph supplied by Alan Godlas.

'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (attributed to Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi), *Tafsir al-*

***Sufi Tafsirs: the Unveiling of Interpretation***

As Alan Godlas has observed, Sufi Qur'an commentary (*tafsir*) as a genre applies a hermeneutical strategy of symbolic allusion (*ishara*).<sup>1</sup> Quranic terms serve as symbolic allusions to interior states, stations, and realizations. This is the "hermeneutic of recognition" in which the Quranic lexicon mirrors the realized mystical experience of the exegete. Exoteric commentaries such as that of al-Tabari adhere to transmissions (*riwaya*) from conventionally authoritative sources such as the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and earlier commentators (*mufasssirun*). These exoteric commentaries focus on issues of syntax, grammar, historical context, and law (*fiqh*). Sufi commentaries employ a hermeneutic steeped in individual experience – a direct intuition or vision of the relationship between the Qur'an and Sufism. This method is called "unveiling" (*kashf*), or more fully "unveiled interpretation" (*ta'wil kashfi*). In the Sufi commentaries examined here, this methodology of unveiling supplements rather than abrogates the use of conventional sources of authority.

In addition to using unveiling as an exegetical method, the commentators use the concept of unveiling to describe the experience and type of knowledge shared in the companionship (*suhba*) between Khidr and Moses. All three commentators view that

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<sup>1</sup>Alan Godlas, "al-Tafsir al-Sufi," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* ([www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/sufitaf/tafsir/loc.html](http://www.arches.uga.edu/~godlas/sufitaf/tafsir/loc.html)); accessed February 9, 2000.

companionship as a training (*ta'dib, riyada*) through which a realm of unmediated knowledge beyond discursive inquiry is unveiled.

The exegetical method of Sufi *tafsirs* is predicated on a model of four levels of Qur'anic exegesis (*ahruf*). The use of a four-level model is traced back to the Prophet's companion 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbas.<sup>2</sup> Ibn 'Abbas identified the four interpretive levels as: (1) moral, (2) literal, (3) spiritual, and (4) symbolic.<sup>3</sup> In a related explanation, Imam al-Ghazali<sup>4</sup> quoted the Prophet's identification of the levels as (1) literal (*zahir*), (2) esoteric (*batin*), (3) a legal (*hadd*), and (4) transcendent (*matla'*).<sup>5</sup> Al-Qushayri situated his exegesis in a slightly different typology, that of Imam Ja'far al-Saddiq: (1) literal meaning (*'ibara*); (2) allegorical allusion (*ishara*), a level of interpretation available to the

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<sup>2</sup> 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim (619-688) was the son of the Prophet's paternal uncle. He was a prolific hadith collector and diligent scholar of the Qur'an, its interpretation, history and the Prophet's biography (*Maghazi*). For his mastery of these fields of knowledge he came to be known as the "Doctor (*habr/hibr*) of the Community" and the "Ocean (*bahr*) of Knowledge."

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 139.

<sup>4</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (450-505/1058-1111). His contribution to the expression of Sunna-based Sufism will be discussed below.

<sup>5</sup> Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 229. Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 139.

elect among believers; (3) mystical subtleties (*lata'if*) addressed to the saints (*awliya'*); and (4) ultimate truths (*haqa'iq*) discerned only by the Prophets.<sup>6</sup>

These models might be compared with their counterpart in European literary theory most famously articulated by Dante: (1) literal or historical, (2) moral or tropological, (3) allegoric (personification or a metaphor for the human situation), and (4) anagogic, the spiritual, or mystical.<sup>7</sup>

Is interpretation limited to past traditions or open to new discovery? Underlying these models is a contested discussion concerning the right to engage the kind of deeper or experiential readings which the hermeneutical mode of unveiling (*kashf*) represents in its most radical form. Al-Ghazali interprets the Prophet's prayer for Ibn 'Abbas' interpretive acumen, "God, instruct him in the religion and teach him the interpretation," as evidence that continual and diverse interpretation is legitimate and necessary.<sup>8</sup> This debate turns on the words of the Prophet: "whoever interprets the

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<sup>6</sup> Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 141. Paul Nwiya, *Exegese Coranique et Langage Mystique* (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq 1970), 167) in Algar, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1981), 194, 11, 18,. Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz, *Literary Terms: a Dictionary* (New York: Noonday Press, 1989), 94. Dante articulated these levels in a letter to his patron Can Grande della Scala to guide him in interpreting the *Divine Comedy*. C. Hugh Holman demonstrates these exegetical styles with this application: "Thus Jerusalem is literally a city in Palestine, allegorically the Church, morally the believing soul, and anagogically the heavenly City of God." (*ibid.*, p. 18)

<sup>8</sup> Al-Ghazali, quoted in Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'an and Its Exegesis*. Ed. and trans., Alford T. Welch. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 230.

Qur'an according to his own opinion (*bi-ra'ihī*) is to receive a place in the hell-fire."<sup>9</sup> Al-Ghazali argues that this does not imply that interpretation can be limited to the literal or explicit meaning. To defend this argument al-Ghazali cites the Prophet's model of four levels of meaning and related traditions describing 60,000 ways of interpreting every verse. Al-Ghazali quotes a commentator who suggests that each of the Qur'an's 77,200 words contains four levels of meaning. This would yield 309,200 meanings! Less hypothetically, Al-Ghazali poses a question about 'Abd Allah Ibn Mas'ud's statement, "Whoever wishes to obtain knowledge about his ancestors and descendants should meditate upon the Qur'an." How, asks al-Ghazali, can an interpretation limited to either the literal level or past tradition yield such ever-unfolding knowledge? Al-Ghazali interprets reports by the Prophet, 'Ali, and Ibn Mas'ud to argue that interpretation is an ongoing process:

Indeed reports and traditions [of the Prophet and others] indicate that for men of understanding there is great latitude (*mutass'*) in the meanings of the Qur'an. Thus 'Ali said, "[The Messenger of God did not confide in me anything which he concealed from people], except that God bestows understanding of the Qur'an upon a man." If there were no meaning (*tarjaman*) other than that which has been transmitted, what then, is [meant by] that understanding of the Qur'an. The Prophet said, 'Surely the Qur'an has an outward aspect (*zahr*), an inward aspect (*batn*), an ending (*hadd*), and a beginning (*matl'*).' This tradition is also related from Ibn Ma'sud on his own authority and he was one of the scholars of exegesis (*'ulama al-tafsir*). What, then, is the meaning of the outward aspect, the inward aspect, end, and beginning? 'Ali said, 'If I wished I could load seventy camels with the exegesis of the Opening Surah (*al-Fatiha*) of the Qur'an.' What is the meaning of this, when the exoteric interpretation of [of this surah] is exceptionally short?...<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Ghazali, *ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Ihya*, I. 260 in Nicholas Heer, "Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's Esoteric Exegesis of the Koran," in *Classical Persian Sufism from Its Origins to Rumi.*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn. (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 238. The Prophet's four levels of meaning is here cited from Ibn Hibban, *Sahih*, in al-'Iraqi, *Mughni*, I, 88.

Al-Ghazali's soundings of the depths of the levels of Qur'anic meaning find a poetic parallel in Jalal ad-Din Rumi's (1207-1273) metaphors of intimacy:

The Koran is a two-sided brocade. Although some benefit from one side of it and some from the other, they are both right because God wants both groups to derive benefit. It is like a woman who has a husband and also a nursing infant: each derives a different pleasure from her, the infant from the milk in her breasts and the husband from being mated to her. People who take external pleasure from the Koran and "drink its milk" are "infants in the way," but those who have attained perfection have a different enjoyment and understanding of the meaning of the Koran.<sup>11</sup>

Ruzbihan Baqli, whose tafsir we will discuss below, evokes the multi-dimensional sense of interpretive possibilities which define Sufi tafsirs:

When I found that the eternal Word had no limit in the outer and the inner, and that...underlying every one of its letters is an ocean of secrets and a river of lights..., I embarked upon the task of scooping from these pre-eternal oceans handfuls of pre-eternal wisdom and post-eternal implications (*isharat*) of which the understanding of the scholar and the mind of the philosopher fall short.<sup>12</sup>

To describe this method of exegesis, Ruzbihan Baqli offers the image of birds.<sup>13</sup> In this trope, the "birds of [his] innermost being" "soar on wings of gnosis" and rise to the uppermost gardens of revelation. These birds of the spirit "seize the blossoms of the subtleties of the Qur'an" which elude exoterically-oriented exegetes :

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<sup>11</sup> Jalal ad-Din Rumi, *Fihī ma fihī*. (Translated, Wheeler Thackston as *Signs of the Unseen*) (Putney, VT: Threshold Books, 1994), 172.

<sup>12</sup> Ruzbihan Baqli, *'Ara'is al-bayan* (Calcutta, 1883), I, 3. trans. Alan Godlas, quoted in A. A. Godlas, "The *'Ara'is al-bayan*, the Mystical Qur'anic Exegesis of Ruzbihan al-Baqli," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 60.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the variety of ways Ruzbihan employs the symbols of "birds" and "flight," see Carl W. Ernst, "The Symbolism of Birds and Flight in the Writings of Ruzbihan Baqli," in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi, 1992), 353-366.

When the birds of my innermost being (*asrari*) had finished flying in the states and stations, rising beyond the battlefields of spiritual combat (*mujahadat*) and self-observation (*muraqabat*), reaching the gardens of unveiling (*mukashafat*) and witnessing (*mushahadat*), alighting on the branches of the flowers of nearness (*mudarat*) and imbibing the wine of union (*wisal*),....from the dawn of the Unmanifest (*gahyb*) they seized the blossoms of the subtleties of the Qur'an and the refinements of the truths of the Criterion (*furqan*). They soared on wings of gnosis (*'irfan*), and in the form of the melodies of paradise, in the best elucidation, they warbled with this tongue the mysteries of God, which He has hidden from the understanding of the people of forms. But I did not become occupied with this affair until after gnosis (*ma 'rifa*) and divine wisdom (*al-hikma al-rabbaniya*) had overwhelmed my heart.<sup>14</sup>

Both of these passages from Ruzbihan define Sufi tafsir as rooted in an experiential knowledge which distinguishes it from the work of "the people of form" (exoteric exegetes) and the scholars and philosophers. From this perspective one might describe the Sufi exegete as one who both finds own mystical experience mirrored in the Qur'an, while also recognizing the Qur'an as a light by which his mystical vision is illuminated. In this sense Carl Ernst describes Ruzbihan's relation to the Qur'an:

Koranic verses, to Ruzbihan, are not mere words, but verbal theophanies, which act as catalysts for the transformation of the listening soul.<sup>15</sup>

These evocations of the role of experience point to the basis upon which Sufi commentators claim that their tafsirs are not merely based on personal opinion (*ra'y*). Through the modes of unveiling (*kashf, mukashafa*) and witnessing (*mushahadat*) to which Ruzbihan alludes in the passage above, Quranic exegesis is developed based on the

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<sup>14</sup> Ruzbihan, *'Ara'is al-bayan* (Calcutta, 1883), I, 3. trans. Alan Godlas, *ibid.*, 59-60

<sup>15</sup> Carl W. Ernst, "The Symbolism of Birds and Flight in the Writings of Ruzbihan Baqli," p. 363.



certainty, not mere opinion, of gnosis (*ma'rifa*) and divine wisdom (*al-hikma al-rabbaniya*) experienced in the heart. In this hermeneutic, the Qur'an is an unending horizon of interpretation whose signs appear continually and boundlessly.

### *The Commentators*

I. Abu'l-Qasim 'Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Talha al-Qushayri (376/986 -465/1072)

Al-Qushayri's *Lata'if al-Isharat (The Subtleties of Allusion)* is the earliest of the three commentaries considered here. It is, in the words of Hamid Algar, "an elegant summation of the first period in the evolution of Sufi *tafsir*."<sup>16</sup> The two words in its title "*Subtleties of Allusion*," invoke two of the four levels of interpretation of the Qur'an identified by Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765):

(1) literal meaning (*'ibara*);

(2) allegorical allusion (*ishara*), a level of interpretation available to the elect among believers;

(3) mystical subtleties (*lata'if*) addressed to the saints (*awliya'*); and

(4) ultimate truths (*haqa'iq*) discerned only by the Prophets.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hamid Algar, "Introduction," in al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*. (Trans., Barbara von Schlegell) Berkeley: Mizan, 1990.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, p. 141. Paul Nwiya, quoted in Algar, *ibid*.

Abu-'l Qasim 'Abd al-Karim b. Hawazin al-Qushayri (376/986-465/1072) was a prominent scholar, teacher, and exegete in Nishapur who contributed to the emerging confluence of Shaf'i law, Ash'arite theology and Sufi reflection. In addition to being a prominent scholar ('*alim*) in the fields of hadith study and jurisprudence, he was a Sufi teacher and writer of the most enduring influence and significance. His *al-Risala fi ilm al-tasawwuf* (*Epistle on the Knowledge of Sufism*) is often-cited in later Sufi writings as a classic, hailed for its mastery and breadth. The *Risala* was a landmark in the exposition of Sufism as system of training and theory which fulfills, rather than contradicts, the Shari'a. Al-Qushayri was the disciple (*murid*) and son-in-law of the Sufi shaykh Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq of Naysapur (d. 405/1015). Both al-Qushayri and al-Daqqaq studied under Abu 'Abd ar-Rahman as-Sulami (325/937-412/1021), also the author of a popular Sufi tafsir which informed the work of al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan, *Haqa'iq al-tafsir*.<sup>18</sup> After al-Daqqaq's death al-Qushayri oversaw al-Daqqaq's *madrasa* in Nishapur, and there led assemblies of divine remembrance (*majalis al-tadhkir*) and later also taught *hadith*. His Qur'an commentary, *Lata'if al-Isharat*, was composed sometime before 410/1019. Al-Qushayri studied *fiqh* with the Shafi'i jurist Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Bakr al-Tusi (d. 420/1029) and *kalam* and *usul al-fiqh* with the Ash'ari scholars Abu Bakr b. Furak (d. 406/1015-16) and Abu Ishaq al-Isfara'ini (d. 418/1027). In conjunction with his performance of the *hajj*, he heard *hadith* in Baghdad and the Hijaz. He began teaching

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<sup>18</sup> Gerhard Bowering, "The Qur'an Commentary of as-Sulami," *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles Adams*, ed. Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little. (Leiden, 1991): 41-56.

*hadith* from his *madrasa* in 437/1046. Al-Qushayri's intention to demonstrate the coherence of *Shari'a* and Sufism was not limited to his own personal conviction and experience; it also reflects the controversies which were ignited near the time in which he began writing his earlier exoteric commentary, *Tafsir al-Taysir fi al-Tafsir*, in 1045.

Al-Qushayri's prominence as an interpreter of Sufism is almost as much a product of the challenges and opportunities of his time as of his own genius. Behind the hermeneutics of unveiling (*kashf*, *mukashafa*) unfurls a backdrop of historical developments pointing to a new direction in Sufism. This new direction is reflected in two emerging tropes in Sufi writings: (1) demonstrating the integrity of Sufism as an expression of Sunni Islam, a project which has been described as *usulization*;<sup>19</sup> and (2) acknowledging the central importance of the directing shaykh (*shaykh al-tarbiyya*) who more intensively supervises his disciples' spiritual practice and daily life.

By al-Qushayri's time Sufis in Nishapur belonged to the *ulema* and had emerged as powerful figures beyond the subculture of Sufism. In earlier centuries Sufis had met in teaching circles (*ta'ifa / tawa'if*) in mosques and in private homes. In the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, Sufism became a part of an emerging *madrasa* culture and Sufi communities, now patronized by a ruling elite, began to meet in their own hospices (*khanaqah/khawaniq*). Sufi institutions became integrated into the mainstream of Islamic society. Under Seljuq patronage, *madrasas* included courses in Sufism in the

teaching curricula and Sufis such as al-Sulami and al-Qushayri taught in the madrasas. The Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk founded a number of Sufi hospices (*khawaniq*) throughout Seljuq lands. Abu Sa'd Abi Khayr, for example, received funding for a *khanqah* which housed 40 Sufis. Some *khawaniq* had hundreds of cells for *fuqara*' and were parts of complexes including mosques. In the new setting of the *khanqah* the Shaykh increased his role as spiritual guide (*shaykh al-tarbiyya*) and supervised the disciple's progress. The *khanqah* made more extensive training possible. This Khurasanian transformation in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries paved the way for the urban Sufi *turuq* of the 12<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> centuries which centered on a particular shaykh's name, charisma, and teaching. It is in the Khurasani period that Sufis first begin to preserve and vest authority in the chain of transmission (*silsila*) so that the Sufi *silsila* and the mantle of initiation (*khirqa*) emerge as correlates to the law school's bases of authority: the chain of transmitters (*isnad*) and the certificate of teaching (*ijaza*).<sup>20</sup>

Al-Qushayri associated Sufism with the legal school of Shafi'i and the theology of al-Ashari. By linking Sufism with the legal school of Shafi'i he found a way to vest Sufism with the legitimacy and security of the sunna. In the theology of al-Ashari, which resisted the imposition of rationalist criteria on explanations of divine nature and

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<sup>19</sup> For the concept of "usulization" and a discussion of its development, see Rkia Elaroui Cornell, *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr an-Niswa al-Muta'abbidat as-Sufiyyat*. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999, pp. 37-40.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Malamud, "Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur," *IJMES* 26 (1994), 427-442. Victor Danner, "The Life and Works of Ibn 'Ata'illah" in *Ibn 'Ata'illah's Sufi Aphorisms* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), 3; and J.S. Trimingham *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969): 8.

action, al-Qushayri could further legitimate Sufism's emphasis on divine mystery and transcendence. But his Ash'arite advocacy thrust him into theological and political turmoil which ended in his flight from Nishapur in 1056. The first Saljuq ruler Tughril Beg (r. 429/1038 - 455/1063), encouraged by his minister 'Amid al-Mulk al-Kundari, a Hanafi and possibly a Mu'tazilite, instigated a campaign against both "renegades" (*rawafid*), i.e., Shi'is and adherents to Ash'ari theology. As both a Shafi'i and a Sufi, al-Qushayri favored the Asha'rite position as a theology which guarded the autonomy of mystery and transcendence from the constraints of reason. In 1044 al-Qushayri issued a *fatwa* and in 1054 an open letter defending Ashar'ite theology and protesting the persecutions. This letter triggered his arrest and imprisonment until he was released following an assault on the citadel. After fleeing Nishapur in 1056, al-Qushayri was commissioned by the caliph al-Qa'im bi Amri'llah, to teach hadith in the palace in Baghdad. In both his *Lata'if al-Isharat* and in his later *Risala*, al-Qushayri demonstrated the consistency between Sufism and the exoteric principles of Islamic Law (*shari'a*). The *Risala* gives such clear examples of his expression of the interrelatedness of Sufism and Shari'a as the following passage demonstrates:

The *Shari'ah* is concerned with the observance of the outward manifestations of religion, whilst *haqiqah* (Reality) concerns inward vision of divine power (*mushahadat ar-Rububiyya*). Every rite not informed by the spirit of Reality is valueless, and every spirit of Reality not restrained by the Law is incomplete. The Law exists to regulate mankind, whilst the Reality makes us to know the dispositions of God. The Law exists for the service of God, whilst the Reality exists for the contemplation of Him. The Law exists for obeying what he had ordained, whilst the Reality concerns witnessing and understanding the order He has decreed: the one is outer, the other inner. I heard the learned Abu 'Ali ad-Daqqaq say, 'The phrase *iybaka na'budu* (Thee we serve) is for sustaining the Law, whilst *iybaka nasta'in* (Thy help we ask) is for affirming the Reality.' Know that the Law is the Reality because God ordained it, and the Reality is also the Law, because it is the knowledge of God that is ordained by Him.<sup>21</sup>

## II. Sadr al-Din Abu Muhammad Ruzbihan b. Abi Nasr al-Fasa'i al-Daylami al-Baqli al-Shirazi (522/1128-606/1209)

Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1209) lived in Shiraz in a period of prosperity and the flowering of culture under the rule of the Salghurid atabegs. Institutional expressions of Sufism were shifting from informal circles and "beginning to become a broadly based social movement."<sup>22</sup> As Carl Ernst has pointed out, Ruzbihan's significance, while it includes his influence on later Sufi's, ultimately rests on his evocative expression of his own mystical experience.<sup>23</sup> Few Sufi writers have so vividly drawn us into the inner world of their mystical states and stations as does Ruzbihan with his colorful and vivid prose. Two external markers of his significance may be indicated as well. The famous traveler Ibn Battuta (in 725/1325) and the geographer Hamd Allah Mustawfi (736/1325)

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<sup>21</sup> Al-Qushayri, *Risala fi 'ilm al-tasawwuf*, Cairo ed. AH 1319, p. 43, quoted in J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 142.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism*. (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), p. ix.

<sup>23</sup> Carl Ernst, "The Symbolism of Birds and Flight in Ruzbihan Baqli." *ibid.*, 354-356.

both reported that Ruzbihan's tomb was a major pilgrimage site.<sup>24</sup> Carl Ernst argues for the possibility, first suggested by Corbin, that Hafiz (d. 791/1389), the great Persian poet of Shiraz, may have taken inspiration and guidance from Ruzbihan's work, especially as a basis for his passionate theophanic witness in human form.<sup>25</sup>

Ruzbihan guided students at the *ribat* which he established in 1165 and which served as his hospice and residence; for fifty years he preached at the principal mosque in Shiraz.<sup>26</sup> His attraction to outrageous ecstatic utterance earned him the sobriquet "Doctor Ecstaticus" (*shaykh- i shattah*). His writings include vivid visionary and densely symbolic passages which infuse his work with poetics and paradox. As Carl Ernst has observed, Ruzbihan unabashedly boasted of his spiritual visions, visions in which he vested the greatest endorsement of his spiritual authority. Ruzbihan may have entered into discipleship with three Sufi masters: (1) Jamal al-Din Abi al-Wafa' ibn Khalil al-Fasa'i, (2) Jagir Kurdi (d. 590/1194), and (3) Siraj al-Din Mahmud ibn Khalifa (d. 562/1166-7) who represented the Kazaruni lineage of Persian Sufism.<sup>27</sup> Although he practiced in the Kazaruni lineage, he did not claim Kazaruni affiliation as the basis of his knowledge and experience. His Qur'an commentary combines these deep visionary

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<sup>24</sup> Henri Corbin, "Introduction" to *Akhbar al-'Ashiqin*, p. 72, cited in Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ernst, *ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>26</sup> Ernst, *ibid.*, 5-6; *idem.*, "Ruzbihan," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*. Vol VI, p. 651-2.

<sup>27</sup> Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli*, p. 2

insights with a lineage of earlier Sufi commentators, particularly, the students of al-Hallaj (d. 309/922).

III. ‘Abd al-Razzaq Kamal al-Din b. Abu ‘I-Ghana’im al-Qāshani (d. 730/1329)

Al-Qāshani (d. 730/1329) was a key figure in the school of Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240) which formed around his step-son and spiritual successor, Sadruddin al-Qunawi (d. 673/1274). Al-Qāshani’s significance is such that James Morris suggests that our understanding of Ibn ‘Arabi’s work is as much an understanding of al-Qāshani as it is of Ibn ‘Arabi:

...[M]uch of the subsequent discussion of Ibn ‘Arabi’s ‘ thought and doctrine, whether in the Eastern Islamic world or in the modern West, can best be understood as in fact a reference to Qashani’s writings – especially where writers are expounding what they take to be Ibn ‘Arabi’s ‘system’ or ‘philosophic doctrine’ (e.g., of *wahdā al-wujud*). In this regard, the modern attribution to Ibn ‘Arabi of Qashani’s *Ta’wilat al-Qur’an* is unfortunately as symptomatic as it is historically unfounded.<sup>28</sup>

Al-Qashani was a pupil of Nuriddin ‘Abd al-Samad and Mu’ayyiduddin al-Jandi (d. 1300). He claimed affiliation with the tradition of Abu Hafs ‘Umar al-Suhrawardi (d. 1234).<sup>29</sup> From al-Jandi, al-Qashani received the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabi as they had been transmitted by Ibn ‘Arabi’s step-son and spiritual successor, Sadruddin al-Qunawi (d. 1274). Al-Qashani was also an accomplished exponent of Ibn ‘Arabi’s work and wrote

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<sup>28</sup> James Winston Morris, “Ibn ‘Arabi and His Interpreters, Pt. II. *JAOS* 107/1 (Jan. - Mar. 1987), 101. Morris goes on in a footnote to balance this impression: “Qashani is *not* at all representative of Ibn ‘Arabi’s ‘style’ or ‘method’ of exegesis, and only to a very limited extent...of Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought.”

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn ‘Arabi*. (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999), p. 262, n. 33.



a number of commentaries, including one on Ibn ‘Arabi’s *Fusus al-hikam*, and the *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Karim*. This Qur’an commentary was long misidentified as a *tafsir* from Ibn ‘Arabi’s own pen. Morris has suggested that al-Qashani’s works relate to Ibn ‘Arabi’s as a grammar to a rich spoken and written living language.<sup>30</sup> In al-Qashani’s work we also find an additional element: the philosophical (*falsafa*) language of Ibn Sina (Avicenna), acquired through Nasr ud-din al-Tusi, which on the one hand made Ibn ‘Arabi’s elliptic style more accessible to philosophically trained readers but also encouraged subsequent misinterpretations of Ibn ‘Arabi as a philosopher.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Summary and Outline of al-Qushayri’s Lata’if al-Isharat***

In the *Lata’if al-Isharat*, al-Qushayri derives four main themes from the story of Moses and Khidr to elucidate the master-disciple (*murshid-murid*) relationship: companionship (*suhba*), moral training (*ta’dib*), right conduct (*adab*), and directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*‘ilm ladunni*).

Our first task is to trace al-Qushayri’s development of issues related to the master-disciple relationship. The second is to explore the transposition of the Qur’anic narrative into a Sufi frame of reference. The numbered sections below identify the themes and structure of al-Qushayri’s interpretation:

#### **(I) Summary: Companionship, knowledge, and conduct**

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<sup>30</sup> James Winston Morris, *ibid.*, 102, n. 75.

<sup>31</sup> James Winston Morris, *ibid.*, p. 105.

- (II) The nature of the Moses' journey of training (*safar al-ta'dib*) contrasted with Moses' period of waiting on Sinai (e.g. Qur'an 2.51; 7.142-154);
- (III) Directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) and the exceptional servant (*khass*):divine inspiration (*ilham*)
- (IV) Right conduct (*adab*) and companionship (*suhba*) with one's guide
- (V) Khidr's three acts viewed from the perspectives of divine command (*hukm*) and unveiling (*kashf*) as contrasted with the conditions of knowledge (*shart al- 'ilm*)

(I) Al-Qushayri explains that Moses' and Khidr's companionship was challenged by their conflicting modes of knowledge. More decisive than Moses' breach of etiquette (*adab*), was his attempt to limit Khidr to the stipulations (*shart/shurut*) of Moses' own knowledge. According to al-Qushayri, even though the forms of Khidr's and Moses' knowledge are complementary, they are not compatible. The distinctiveness of their forms of knowledge is implied in the Qur'anic narrative: Khidr's knowledge is called both "guidance" (*rushd*) and unmediated divine knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) while Moses' understanding is simply called "knowledge" (*khubr*). What then is Khidr's special guidance and unmediated knowledge? Al-Qushayri characterizes Khidr's knowledge through four Sufi concepts: (1) divine inspiration (*ilham*), (2) divine commandment (*hukm*), (3) unveiling (*kashf*), and (4) seclusion (*khalwa*).

In his interpretation of the story of Moses and Khidr, al-Qushayri focuses on their companionship (*suhba*). The term companionship (*suhba*) appears as a verb in the narrative as Moses says, "If I ask you about anything after this, then do not keep companionship with me (*fa-la tusahib-ni*). The word *suhba* suggests the related term for the Prophet Muhammad's companions (*sahaba*). In the sense in which al-Qushayri has

placed it, the word *suhba* describes the relationship of mentoring between master and disciple. This sense of companionship (*suhba*) is effectively described in a passage by Abu Najib al-Suhrawardi where he compares the *suhba* with one's shaykh to the loyalty shown to the Prophet Muhammad by his companions (*sahaba*).

Companionship with the master (*ustadh*) is by obedience, so it is not really companionship, but service. Complete obedience and respect toward the master are required. The master in the midst of his followers is like the prophet in the midst of his community. Junayd once answered a question of one of his disciples and the latter expressed objection to the answer; Junayd then said, "If you do not believe in my words dissociate yourselves from me." [In this answer, Junayd had quoted Surat al-Dukhan (44).21] He should behave toward the shaykh like the Companions with the Prophet in following the ethics of the Qur'an. "O you who believe! Do not assert yourselves before Allah and His Messenger, but fear Allah, for Allah is He who knows all things. O you who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him in talk, as you may speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds become vain and you perceive not." (Surat al-Hujurat [49].1-2) "Deem not the summons of the Messenger among yourselves like the summons of one of you to another. Allah knows those of you who slip away under shelter of some excuse. Then let those beware who withstand the Messenger's order, lest some trial befall them, or a grievous penalty be inflicted on them." (Surat al-Nur [24].63)<sup>32</sup>

(II) Al-Qushayri identifies the purpose of Moses' journey as one of "moral training" (*ta'dib*) and enduring hardship which underlies the possibility of seeking knowledge:

It had been a journey of moral training (*ta'dib*) and the endurance of hardship. This is because he went to increase his knowledge. The state of seeking knowledge is a state of moral training and a time of enduring hardship. (406)

Here al-Qushayri establishes a correlation between the spiritual work of character formation and the acquisition of knowledge. Al-Qushayri identifies Moses' journey toward the meeting of the two seas as one in which Moses was burdened, and as a journey of moral training (*safar al-ta'dib*). Al-Qushayri contrasts this journey with

Moses' period of waiting on Sinai. On Sinai, Moses did not endure hunger or fatigue because there he had been journeying directly to God, and was sustained.

(III) Khidr's gifts – God-given mercy (*rahma*) and directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*'ilm ladduni*) – imply for al-Qushayri that Khidr is one of the “elect of the elect” (*jumla min khass al-khawaas*), an exemplary paradigm of the elect (407). Khidr is imbued with compassion (*marham*) in order to bestow that compassion on other servants. These gifts are acquired through divine inspiration (*ilham*). In using this term, al-Qushayri has begun to associate the Qur'anic motifs within the technical lexicon of expressions (*alfaz*) in Sufism: unmediated knowledge (*'ilm ladurni*) is divine inspiration (*ilham*); the servant (*'abd*) is one of the elect (*khass /khawass*).

(III.1) Al-Qushayri also emphasizes that directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*'ilm ladduni*) is given, not sought. This unmediated knowledge is intended not for its recipient, but for the servants to whom it will be transmitted. In fact, al-Qushayri asserts, it brings no benefit to its direct recipient; it benefits those servants. It is acquired “without intentional effort.” (408). In a point which Ruzbihan quotes, it is beyond proof or evidence (408; R. 591).

(IV) Al-Qushayri recognizes a level of subtlety and discretion in Moses' etiquette (*adab*) in seeking permission to follow and join in companionship (*suhba*).

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<sup>22</sup> Abu al-Najib al-Suhrawardi, *Kitab Adab al-Muridin* (trans. Menahem Milson, *A Sufi Rule for Novices.*) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 46-47.

(408). Moses' behavior is appropriate to more than the exercise of right conduct (*adab*), toward one's teacher (*shaykh*); it applies to the subtle nature of the knowledge Moses seeks.

(IV.1) The subtlety or sensitivity implied here touches on an epistemological paradox. Al-Qushayri exposes what I will call the "paradox of mediation": the knowledge which Moses seeks is inherently unteachable:

"It is said that the knowledge for which Khidr was selected was not taught to him by a teacher (*ustadh*), nor from a person. So if no one has taught him, then how would he be able to teach it to another?" (408)

Since directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*'ilm ladduni*) is immediate, how can it be mediated? Al-Qushayri cites this problem as the reason for Khidr's answer, "How will you bear what your understanding cannot encompass."

(IV.2) Does al-Qushayri succeed in resolving this dilemma of unteachability? Al-Qushayri identifies two keys in Moses' answer, "You will find me patient, God willing, and I will not disobey you in any affair" (18.69):

- (1) patience (*sabr*) and
- (2) obedience (*la aa 'siya*; "I will not disobey.").

For al-Qushayri an important correlation emerges: While Moses sought God's will in promising to be patient and, in al-Qushayri's eyes, partially fulfilled his pledge, Moses also failed explicitly in fulfilling the second intention, because Moses made that intention

without acknowledging the role of God's will. Al-Qushayri credits Moses with a limited degree of success in acting patiently for a while, as demonstrated by the fact that he did not restrict Khidr from acting. So in response to the dilemma of unteachability, al-Qushayri presents three factors as partial explanations of the conditions of learning:

(1) patience,

(2) obedience, and

(3) seeking God's will, or more precisely, invoking God's will in one's expression of intention to follow in companionship for the sake of learning guidance (*rushd*).

(IV.3) By his answer, Khidr demonstrates the capacity to tap into the key issue in Moses' heart:

So he [Khidr] discerned his [Moses's] heart (*tadaraka qalbahu*) in his saying, "How will you bear with what your knowledge does not encompass?"<sup>33</sup>

Implicit in Khidr's statement is also the quality of a warning concerning the challenge of fulfilling the journey of moral training (*safar al-ta'dib*) (p. 411). Al-Qushayri presents the phenomenon of reading hearts at two levels: first Khidr comprehends Moses' heart with deep discernment; second, al-Qushayri interprets two principles from Moses' soul that suggest how the journey is accomplished: patience and obedience.

(IV.4) Al-Qushayri applies this dialogue directly to the question of right conduct (*adab*) between the shaykh and his disciple (*murid*):

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<sup>33</sup> Al-Qushayri, *Lata'if al-Isharat*, p. 408.

("He [Khidr] said [to Moses], 'If you follow, don't ask.' " [18.70]) The disciple (*murid*) does not [have the right to] say "no" to his master (*shaykh*), nor the pupil (*talmidh*) to his teacher (*ustadh*), nor the lay person to the learned jurisprudent (*al-'aalim al-mufti*)... (409)

Here al-Qushayri directly applies the story Moses and Khidr as a model for the relationship between Sufi master and disciple and of the principle that the disciple may not contradict his master .

(V) In treating the three acts on the journey, al-Qushayri offers two levels of interpretation: exoteric and esoteric.

(V.1) He explains that the scuttling of the hull of the boat was for the preservation of the owner, through making the vessel unattractive to the covetous king. Al-Qushayri then paraphrases Khidr's reminder ("Didn't I tell you that you would not be able to bear what I will do patiently?") to distinguish two epistemological levels:

That is, you [Moses] are looking at this from the point of view of knowledge. We [Khidr and Allah] are proceeding from the point of view of *hukm* (divine commandment, wisdom). (409)

(V.2) Al-Qushayri applies the distinction between divine commandment and knowledge to the interpretation of the slaying of the youth. He acknowledges Moses' right based on the extent of his knowledge to wish to stop the killing, because it involves the "overturning of the norm" (*qalaba al-'ada*), a phrase connoting miracle and mystery, of external injustice (*fi-'l zahir zulm<sup>an</sup>*). But again Moses has stopped short at the "stipulations of knowledge" (*shart al-'ilm/ shurut al-'ilm*). The appropriate mode of

knowing in this case is unveiling (*kashf*). In addition to requiring that Khidr's actions comply with the limits of his knowledge, Moses compounded this mistake by setting conditions on his teacher:

He [Khidr] repeated his statement ("You will not be able to have patience...") because he [Moses] stopped at the requirement of knowledge. But on the contrary, it has to do with the state of unveiling (*kashf*). So Moses made conditions for him, saying, ("If I ask you anything, then do not keep company with me.") He showed his disobedience three times. And three is the outer limit of a few, and the inner limit of many, so he [Moses] could not find any forgiveness after that. (410)

Now al-Qushayri's previous distinction between Moses's level of knowledge and the *hukm* (commandment, wisdom) followed by Khidr is amplified by the introduction of the parallel between *shart al-'ilm* (the requirement of knowledge, i.e., the obligatory limit) and unveiling (*kashf*) which is the mode of knowledge implicit in the narrative's motif of directly disclosed divine knowledge. The concept of the pre-condition of knowledge (*shart al-'ilm*) expands on the earlier concept that *ilham* (divine inspiration) is acquired without effort (*takalluf*) and essentially freely given without seeking. Unveiling (*kashf*) is a mode of knowing which Moses cannot control and whose terms Moses cannot negotiate, despite his efforts to do so.

(V.3) Al-Qushayri, following sound hadith, confirms Khidr's declaration of parting from Moses as one of applying the terms Moses set on himself. In this sense Khidr's act mirrors Moses' actions:



It is said that al-Khidr said, "Indeed, you are a prophet...however whatever compels you in what I said, you are obligated by the conditions (*shart*) [as] you said, "If indeed I ask you about anything after this, then do not keep company with me. Nonetheless, I am acting on your statement." And it is said, when Moses did not remain patient with him in asking, Khidr was also not patient with him in continuing [their] companionship and [Khidr] chose separation (*firaq*). (411)

(V.4) Moses' motives are also an important point of consideration. Al-Qushayri distinguishes between Moses's first two reproaches and the decisive third remonstrance which brings on Khidr's decisive words of dismissal: "This is the parting between me and you." Again, echoing hadith, Moses' first two challenges were raised altruistically on behalf of the people in the boat and the slain child. But his objection over the rebuilding of the wall was motivated by his own desire of a gift of food for himself.

As long as Moses (a.s.) asked on behalf of others in the matter of the boat which was on behalf of the poor ones and the killing of the soul without right (*haqq*), Khidr did not separate from him. When he spoke the third time in seeking a gift of food for himself, he was afflicted in separation. So Khidr said to him, "This is the parting between me and you." (411)

(V.5) Al-Qushayri distinguishes between Moses and Khidr their different motives for companionship (*suhba*) as well as their different types of companionship. Each represents distinct epistemological options. Al-Qushayri characterizes Moses' motives for companionship as a quest for explicit knowledge (*'ilm al-shart*), whereas Khidr seeks companionship with God, a companionship which is a retreat or seclusion (*khalwa*) with God apart from creation. In this sense Moses seeks well-defined knowledge as contrasted with an inner knowledge which while more subtle, is also more certain.

(V.5.1) This inner knowledge is identified progressively in al-Qushayri's analysis as directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*'ilm ladduni*), divine inspiration (*ilham*), divine command (*hukm*), unveiling (*kashf*), and seclusion [with God] (*khalwa*).

(V.5.2) Attaining unmediated knowledge through companionship (*suhba*) is a distinct mode of knowledge apart from knowledge related to the conditions of knowledge (*shurut al-'ilm*). Companionship (*suhba*) cannot be fulfilled within the mode of knowledge where Moses seeks it, i.e., the stipulations of knowledge (*shurut al-'ilm*). This point addresses the question of al-Qushayri raised earlier: the dilemma of mediation: How can the unteachable be taught? It is not in the realm of mentoring companionship to explain the stipulations of knowledge (*shurut al-'ilm*) and its application. The mediating categories – the conditions for successful companionship -- are the two Khidr stipulated: patience and obedience. Companionship, as al-Qushayri describes it, involves these more subtle and immediate modes of knowledge.

And it is said that just as Moses (a.s.) desired the companionship (*suhba*) of Khidr for the purpose of increasing knowledge, Khidr desired to leave the companionship (*suhba*) of Moses (a.s.) from his propensity for seclusion (*khalwa*) with Allah, apart from the created ones. (412)

(V.5.3) Al-Qushayri examines the question of Moses' ability to understand the intentions behind Khidr's acts. Khidr, in al-Qushayri's view, used the power and presence of his state (*hal*) to remove "even a semblance of objection" from Moses' heart and disclosed the deeper meaning (*ta'wil*) and the "secret of his [Khidr's] intention."

These intentions are then spelled out in a series of theodicies: the boat was destroyed to protect its wholeness (*salaam*) and for its preservation (*baqa'*); the exchange of the slain child with one purer and more compassionate brings “happiness” (*sa'ada*) to the parents; fixing the wall protected the treasure and made it permanent (*istibqa'*) to allow its later retrieval (*tafrid*). These reflections are implicitly theodicies. However, al-Qushayri does not focus on this potential exegetical implication. Although the terms al-Qushayri uses suggest Sufi concepts, it is noteworthy that al-Qushayri does not more explicitly apply these motifs as analogies to Sufi psychology and training, to the degree that we shall find developed in Ruzbihan, and especially al-Qashani.

Al-Qushayri develops from the narrative of Khidr and Moses, a typology of spiritual companionship (*suhba*) through a journey of moral training (*safar al-ta'dib*). In this companionship, guidance (*rushd*) and deeper meaning (*ta'wil*), apparently unteachable modes of knowledge, may be at least partly conveyed under certain conditions. The two conditions explicitly identified are patience (*sabr*) and obedience (*la'aa'siaa*). First, al-Qushayri explains the Qur'anic motif of directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*'ilm ladduni*) as divine inspiration (*ilham*). Moses and Khidr model two distinct modes of knowing. In contrast to the “stipulations of knowledge” or (*shart al-'ilm*) which Moses tries to impose, Khidr directly receives the gifts of “divine commandment of wisdom” (*hukm*) through “unveiling” (*kashf*), especially through “seclusion” (*khalwa*) with Allah.

*Summary of al-Qushayri's interpretation.* The type of companionship which Moses would impose on Khidr fails. Al-Qushayri explains that the problem is not merely Moses' lack of knowledge, but Moses' insistence on applying a limited and restricted mode of knowledge. Moses' knowledge is limited by conditions and legal requirements (*shari*) which compound the problem that since Khidr's knowledge (*'ilm ladduni, rushd*) is immediate, it is non-transmittable. The Qur'an designates Khidr's knowledge by the terms "God-given knowledge" (*'ilm ladduni*), "guidance" (*rushd*), and "hermeneutics" (*ta'wil*). Al-Qushayri explains these Quranic terms in terms of "divine inspiration" (*ilham*), "divine commandment" (*hukm*), "unveiling" (*kashf*), and "seclusion" (*khalwa*). Using these terms and the conflict between Moses and Khidr, al-Qushayri illuminates the pedagogical situation between master (*shaykh*) and disciple (*murid*) in ways which are both explicit and subtle.

On the one hand, al-Qushayri acknowledges and develops the theme that the narrative informs a model of right conduct (*adab*) between master (*murshid*) and disciple (*murid*). On the other hand, his articulation of this correspondence seems restrained or reticent. Why would an exegete who was himself a *shaykh* and a *murid* restrain his expression of the analogy between the story of Khidr and Moses and the master-disciple relationship? At this point in our discussion, we would look to the project reflected in al-Qushayri's work. On the whole, it is an effort to position Sufism and its culture as consistent with the most generally-accepted exoteric religious norms (*shari'a*). From this

perspective the advantages for using this story as a legitimation for the sensitive and contested authority invested in the position of the shaykh would not be without complication. Al-Qushayri's point that the two modes of knowledge embodied in Khidr and Moses complicate their companionship still conforms to the hadith account that Khidr and Moses each possesses a type of knowledge which the other does not understand.<sup>34</sup> In light of al-Qushayri work to reconcile the viewpoints of the scholarly elite (*'ulama'*) and the sufis, then we can fully appreciate the significance and importance of the references to the master-disciple relationship which he does advance.

***Summary and Outline of Ruzbihan Baqli's 'Ara'is al-Bayan al-Haqa'iq al-Qur'an (The Brides of Elucidation of the Realities of the Qur'an***

Ruzbihan's discussion of the story of Moses and Khidr (Qur'an 18.60-82) centers around five topics:

- (I) a lexicon of terms related to the psyche;
- (II) the journey of moral training (*safar al-ta'dib*) described by this narrative (Qur'an 18.60-82) as compared to Moses' experience on Sinai (e.g. Qur'an 2.51; 7.142-154);
- (III) the designation of God's real servants (*al-'ibad bi-'l haqiqa*) as the elect (*khawass*) to whom God imparts gnosis (*ma'rifa*) and sainthood (*wilaya*);

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<sup>34</sup> Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*. I.3.45.124; IV. 55. 23. 613; VI. 60. 249, 250, 251.

- (IV) the relationship between Moses and Khidr as a model for the principles of proper conduct (*adab*) and spiritual companionship (*suhba*) between spiritual guide (*shaykh*) and aspirant (*murid*); and
- (V) the essential unity (*'ayn al-jam'*) behind the apparent forms of mediation and expressions of intention.

Within each of these rubrics – and especially under numbers three and four -- Ruzbihan explores a number of important issues and implications. We can readily see the integral relationship between Ruzbihan's work and al-Qushayri's in both content and structure. But Ruzbihan, unsaddled by the political risks which al-Qushayri negotiated exercises greater freedom in exploring the implications of these themes than he shares with al-Qushayri. What follows is an outline and summary of Ruzbihan's analysis.

### *I. The Lexicon of Spiritual Psychology.*

Ruzbihan assesses Moses' persistence in the journey in terms of the elements of Moses' psyche. These components include: the lower soul (*nafs*), the heart (*qalb*), the intellect (*'aql*), and the faculty of the inner sense (*sirr*). The *sirr* for Ruzbihan is the faculty which surpasses both the intellect and the heart and apprehends the "wisdoms of the unseen" (*hikam al-ghayb*). What brought the suffering of fatigue (*nasab*) to Moses' soul was ignorance of the wisdom of the unseen which stems from not using the faculty of the inner sense. Accordingly, if Moses' heart and soul had known as

much as his faculty of inner sense, then, Ruzbihan asserts, Moses would have experienced no exhaustion or fatigue. In such a journey as this, Ruzbihan feels that while the heart and intellect can succumb to fatigue, the faculty of inner sense does not. Thus, even though Moses was in the station of striving (*maqam al-mujahada*) and testing (*imtihan*), his faculty of inner sense would not have been subject to exhaustion in such work.

## II. *Moses' Journey of Training compared with his Witnessing at Sinai.* (18.60-64)

II.1. Ruzbihan describes the journey of training (*ta'dib*) as the work of the "people of aspiration" (*ahl al-irada*). This verbal noun *irada* (which can be defined variously as "desire," "intention," "will," and "aspiration") gives us the active participle *murid* ("seeker," "aspirant"), a term Ruzbihan raises later in the discussion to describe Moses' relationship to Khidr. The term *murid* is also the classical term for the disciple of a Sufi master. Similarly, the passive participle *murad* is the term for the Sufi master meaning one who is longed for. According to Carl Ernst, the term *irada* describes the master-disciple relationship: "The relationship between the two [master and disciple] was indicated by the term *irada*, meaning longing or desire."<sup>35</sup> Ruzbihan contrasts the journey of training which is the work of the people of *irada*, with Moses' experience on Sinai as that of the "state of the people of intimacy (*uns*)."<sup>35</sup> The people of aspiration receive mediation (*wasita*) and are engaged in a process of striving

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<sup>35</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 124.

(*mujahada*). In comparison, the people of intimacy receive the burden of the share of witnessing (*mushahada*). Ruzbihan recognizes this state within the following hadith: “I pass the night with my Lord; He feeds me and gives me drink.”<sup>37</sup> Such direct access to God is one of the qualities of the state of the people of intimacy. The journey of moral training (in contrast to Moses’ experience at Sinai) is characterized by the fact that Moses “suffers in striving.”

II.2 . God sent Moses to learn the knowledge of the unseen (*‘ilm al-ghayb*).<sup>38</sup>

Since Moses was trained in the truth (“Truth trained him.” [*addabahu al-haqq*]), Moses did not realize his own possession of “something of the knowledge of divine realities.” Ruzbihan reiterates this theme of Moses possession of the truth within him later in his discussion (cf. IV.2, below).

II.3 The journey is a journey of moral training (*safar al-ta’dib*). The conditions of the journey of moral training include enduring hardship (a time of bearing hardship and hunger) and being carried along on the journey by God. This fact of sustenance belies the apparency of the struggle (*mujahada*) which defines Moses’ engagement in spiritual training (*ta’dib*).

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<sup>37</sup> *Sahih Bukhari* Bk. 82; Ch. 29; Hadith 834

<sup>38</sup> Here Ruzbihan applies a term that goes back to the classical commentary of al-Tabari, See Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (224/5-310 / 839-923), *Jami’ al-bayan ‘an ta’wil al-Qur’an* (30 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Alamin, 1992). p. 206, para. 23209. This passage is discussed in chapter three.



II.4. In being trained by God, Moses lost sight of the fact that he possessed something of the knowledge of divine realities (*'ulum al-haqa'iq*). For this reason God sent Moses to learn the knowledge of the unseen (*'ilm al-ghayb*).

II.5. In this journey (in contrast to Sinai) Moses is burdened (*muhtamal*). (p. 590)

### III. *The Exceptional Servant and Perfect Gnosis* (18.65)

The “servant from among our servants” is distinguished as an exceptional [servant] (*khawass*) or “servant-in-reality” (*'abd bi'l-haqiqa*) endowed with “sufficient compassion” (*al-rahma al-kafiya*). This compassion is expressed as “sainthood (*wilaya*), nearness [to God], and witnessing [of divine reality].” The “directly-disclosed divine knowledge” (*al-'ilm al-ladunni*) is imparted to the servant in truth as a perfect gnosis (*ma'rifa kamila*). As models of this degree of servanthood, Ruzbihan cites both Khidr and the Prophet Muhammad. (p. 591)

Ruzbihan implies here that Muhammad and Khidr share a special status among all prophetic or saintly exemplars. Further he has developed an interpretation of the meaning of “exceptional servant” as a saint. This exegetical move allows Khidr’s story to serve to legitimate the Sufi mode of authority of *wilaya* (sainthood).

III.1. The servant (*'abd*) named Khidr is one of the exceptional servants (*khawass min 'ibada*). The exceptional servants are those whom God selects to impart gnosis (*ma'rifa*) from four areas:

- (1) the sciences of lordship (*'ulum al-rububiya*),
- (2) the secrets of unicity (*asrar al-wahdaniyya*),
- (3) the realities of wisdom (*haqa'iq al-hukma*)
- (4) subtle graces of angelic and majestic realms (*lata'if malakutihi wa jabarutihi*).

III.2. The exceptional servants are described as belonging to four classes of people:

- (1) The People of the Unseen
- (2) The People of the Unseen of the Unseen
- (3) The People of the Secret
- (4) The People of the Secret of the Secret.

III.3. God conceals exceptional servants within Himself and veils them from creation. This veiling is an act of compassion (*shafaqat*) due to their manifestation of the secret of God (*sirr Allah*).

III.4. The exceptional servants (*khawass*) are “servants-in-reality” or “servants-in-truth” (*'ibad bi-'l-haqiqa*). They are those who have reached the reality of servanthood, meaning that God made their servanthood “parallel” (*muhadhiya*) to His Lordship. This metaphor of being “parallel to His Lordship” articulates in the word *muhadhiya* (from the root *ha-dhal-waw*) a sense of “to imitate” and “to be

alongside of.”<sup>39</sup> These servants resemble through imitation the divine qualities. The servants-in-reality are distinguished by the gnosis they have received. Although from a perspective within creation, all God’s servants stand on an equal basis, from the perspective of gnosis, there exists a category of real servants: the selected servants (*khawass*). Ruzbihan asserts that these distinctions of servant-in-truth and selected servant are implicit in the hadith report which Ruzbihan cites in which the Prophet Muhammad stipulates, “ I am the servant – *la ilaha illa Allah* – I am the servant in truth and no other.” Therefore, Ruzbihan continues, Khidr has achieved the greatest honor (*ashraf*) in the very fact of God calling him a servant (‘*abd*).

III.5. The real servant (such as Khidr) is one upon whom God in pre-eternity (*azal*) bestowed “sufficient compassion” (*rahmatu al-kafiya*). Only by virtue of this compassion is it permissible (or, we might add, even plausible) for a servant to even declare his status since (in principle) God has no need of service from impermanent creatures.

III. 6. Ruzbihan specifies three aspects of *rahma* (divine beneficence, compassion, or mercy) as *rahma* is used to describe one of the gifts borne by Khidr. *Rahma* includes (1) sainthood (*wilaya*), (2) nearness (*qurb<sup>an</sup>*), and witnessing (*mushahada*). In relation to Ruzbihan’s articulation of Moses state of knowledge at

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<sup>39</sup> Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithica, NY: Spoken Language Services), 1976, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed.

Sinai as one of witnessing, this trio of attributes implies a sense of Khidr's superior status.

III.7. Khidr's direct divine knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) is a "perfect gnosis" (*ma'rifa kamila*). Ruzbihan proceeds to describe the characteristics of the perfect gnosis which is directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*):

(1) Perfect gnosis is a knowledge unknown and concealed from many of the elect (*akhyar* ["the best"]).

(2) It is a "special direct knowledge" (*'ilm al-ladunni al-khass*) which God has reserved for Himself and for the "elect of the elect."

(3) Directly-disclosed divine knowledge is "the wisdom of the unseen in an unknowable form" (*hikmat al-ghayb 'ala sura al-majhula*). This sense of an unknowable knowledge harks back to al-Qushayri's discussion of the problem that the knowledge sought by Moses is unteachable: since Khidr received it directly and without it being taught, how can Khidr, in turn, teach it to Moses?<sup>40</sup>

(4) The realities of this knowledge correspond to – perhaps, imbue – benefits to creation and are connected to knowledge of the realm of divine actions.

(5) Ruzbihan describes five levels of directly-disclosed divine knowledge.

(a) The proofs of the knowledge of the realm of divine actions (*af'al*) are given to the selected servant (*khass*) to strengthen, root, or establish servanthood. Ruzbihan's notion of the establishment of servanthood

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<sup>40</sup> Al-Qushayri, *Lata'if al-Isahrat*, p. 408.

serves not only to legitimate the status of the exceptional servant, but also allows him to fulfill al-Qushayri's dictum that directly-disclosed divine knowledge is granted to the servant, not for himself, but in his service to others.<sup>41</sup>

(b) The next level of *'ilm ladunni* is the understanding (*wuquf*) of part of the secret of predestination.

(c) Next is given knowledge of divine names and special qualities.

(d) Then comes knowledge of divine attributes (*sifat*).

(e) Finally, one receives knowledge of the essence (*dhat*).

Ruzbihan also adds that "knowledge of the ambiguous [verses]" (*mutashabbihat*) is a special part of the knowledge that is unknowable. While it is most likely that in invoking the term *mutashabbihat*, Ruzbihan is referring to the knowledge of the ambiguous verses (alluded to in Qur'an 3.7), it also is possible that he may be using the term *mutashabbihat* in the sense of discerning analogies, or understanding the deep meaning of events. This would convey a sense of *mutashabbihat* consistent with the Qur'anic context (3.7). There the knowledge of *mutashabbihat* relates to *ta'wil* (deep meaning) which is the term Khidr uses for the interpretations of his actions which he conveys to Moses.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 408.

(6) Ruzbihan next turns to the question of how directly-disclosed divine knowledge is known. He explains that it is known by the unveiling (*mukashafat*) and manifestation (*zuhur*) of the unseen (*mughayyabat*). It is through unveiling and manifestation that all that is connected to directly-disclosed divine knowledge (i.e., points 5a-e listed above) comes to be known. Ruzbihan's answer describes some of the characteristics of witnessing (*mushahada*).

(7) Ruzbihan introduces and describes "primordial knowledge" (*'ilm al-qadim*):

(a) Primordial knowledge is a characteristic (*wasf*) of the truth (*al-haqq*) and a part of the science of lordship (*'ilm al-rububiya*).

(b) Primordial knowledge is connected with two functions:

(1) special inspiration (*ilham al-khass*)

(2) hearing the eternal speech (*sama' kalam al-qadim*) without intermediary (*bi-ghayr al-wasita*).

This last point suggests that this knowledge includes prophecy. Ruzbihan asserts that the knowledge possessed by Khidr includes the capacity of directly hearing God's eternal speech. On this count, Khidr's knowledge appears at least equal to, if not superior to that of Moses. To the degree that Ruzbihan is developing the implications of his exegetical predecessors, they also may have indirectly hinted at this perspective which Ruzbihan asserts later (cf. IV.1.2).

(8) Ruzbihan quotes earlier masters on the definition of directly-disclosed divine knowledge to support his own explanation:

(a) Dhu'l-Nun Misri stressed that this knowledge is “decreed for people in situations of divine assistance and abandonment.”

(b) Ibn ‘Ata explained that it comes without intermediaries, by unveiling, and is not intellectually acquired.

(c) al-Hallaj identified it as divine inspiration (*ilham*).

(d) al-Qushayri observed that it without effort or intermediaries.

(e) Junayd described it as an unveiling of lights which results from scrutinizing one’s body for its deviations and eradicating one’s intentions. (p. 591)

(f) al-Tustari explained that divine inspiration is a form of revelation (*wahy*) such as the revelation (*wahy*) given to the bee (Qur’an 16.68) and the mother of Moses (28.7).

(g) Al-Qushayri is quoted again: in designating the human being as God’s servant, God made him a member of the elect (*khawass*). When God called him, “My servant,” he became one of the elect of the elect (*khawass al-khawass*). On directly-disclosed divine knowledge, al-Qushayri is quoted: “Directly-disclosed divine knowledge is what is attained by way of divine inspiration (*ilham*) without intentional effort.”

(h) Ruzbihan quotes anonymously a source who explains that directly-disclosed divine knowledge is the condition of upright servants which God teaches to His saints.

#### IV. *The Master-Disciple Relationship* (18.66)

What is the training (*riyada*) in proper conduct (*adab*) and spiritual companionship (*suhba*) between master (*shaykh*) and disciple (*murid*) which the story of Khidr and Moses models?

IV.1. Moses demonstrated the most beautiful conduct (*ahsana adab*) in seeking permission to follow Khidr (18.66).

IV.2. Moses sought a limitless knowledge which surpassed his own knowledge. Ruzbihan writes that it is “the most exalted guidance” because through learning this knowledge Moses finds it within himself. (cf. II.5 above) In a sense this “secret knowledge, the hidden light” is simultaneously beyond and yet, within Moses.

IV.3. (18.67-77) Moses companionship with Khidr is a test from God, which in Ruzbihan’s interpretation serves as a model for the master-disciple relationship in Sufism.

[God] tested him [Moses] through companionship with Khidr, in order to straighten the way (*tariq*), to establish the tradition (*sunna*) in following the masters (*masha’ikh*) so that he would be a model (*uswa*) for the aspirants (*muridin*) and for those who seek by serving the masters of the way (*ashyakh al-tariqa*).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ruzbihan, *‘Ara’is al-Bayyan*, p. 592



IV.3.1 The test of companionship establishes the tradition of following the masters.

IV.3.2. Through being tested in companionship with Khidr, Moses serves as a model for disciples (*muridin*) of the “masters of the way.” Through his use of the term *murid*, Ruzbihan represents Moses as the model of the disciple of a Sufi master.

Ruzbihan’s designation of Moses as a model of the *murid* is shared by al-Qushayri in an explanation from his Treatise (*Risala*):

The Master Abu ‘Ali ad-Daqqaq explained, “The *murid* is made to bear and the *murad* is borne.” He also commented, “Moses (peace be upon him) was a *murid* because he said, ‘O Lord, expand for me my breast.’ (20.25). Our prophet (may God’s blessing and peace be upon him) was a *murad* because God most High says of him, ‘Have we not expanded for you your breast, lifted from you your burden that weighed down your back, and exalted your fame?’ (94:1-4). Moses also requested, ‘O my Lord, show Yourself to me that I may look upon You.’ [God said] ‘You will never see me [directly].’ (7.143)<sup>43</sup>

IV.4. In their possession of different aspects of God’s knowledge, Moses and Khidr each surpass each other. Although Moses was more knowledgeable than Khidr in terms of what he received of divine truth, Moses did not possess Khidr’s distinctive knowledge.

IV.4.1. Khidr’s knowledge is a door (*bab ‘ilm Khidr*) through which Moses entered to the realm of unknowable knowledge (*al-‘ilm al majhul*). By entering the door of Khidr’s knowledge, Moses reached a station (*maqam*) in which both Khidr’s knowledge and the knowledge of all creation becomes hidden. This was a station of

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<sup>43</sup> Al-Qushayri, *Risalah al-Qushayriyah*. Translated by Barbara von Schlegell, *Principles of Sufism*. (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1990), 180-181.

grace (*fadh Allah*) imparted to Moses. Ruzbihan quotes a statement of Faris Dinawari (a disciple of al-Hallaj) that Moses was more knowledgeable in terms of received knowledge, while Khidr was more knowledgeable about the events happening to Moses.

IV.4.2. Ruzbihan draws the following contrasts between the knowledge, learning, and self-existence of Moses and Khidr:

IV.4.2.1. In terms of knowledge, Moses has received more knowledge of God's truth, while Khidr has more knowledge of the events of Moses' life. The implications of this distinction apply to Ruzbihan's later distinction between training (*ta'dib*) and instruction (*ta'lim*). (See IV.5.7 below.) Khidr's knowledge applies more to the state of Moses particular soul and involves the capacity to guide and train a disciple. Moses knowledge is not related to the capacity of spiritual guidance.

IV. 4.2.2. In terms of learning, or training, Khidr's knowledge is a door for Moses. In passing through the door of Khidr's knowledge, Moses enters the realm of unknowable knowledge in which other types of formal knowledge (Khidr's knowledge and the knowledge of creation) become hidden. This is a station of grace.

IV. 4.2.3. In terms of existence: Khidr was annihilated in the truth (*faniyyan bi-'l-Haqq*) while Moses was eternally established in truth (*baqiyatun bi-'l-Haqq*). At one level, because Khidr was consumed (*mustahlak*) he could not exercise authority. But on another level, Ruzbihan asserts there is no distinction between Moses' state of

being eternally established and Khidr's state of being annihilated because both spoke from a single source.

IV.5. Ruzbihan examines the elements of the companionship (*suhba*) between Moses and Khidr. What made this teaching relationship possible and what forms of resistance – on both sides – undermined their relationship?

IV.5.1. First Ruzbihan considers Khidr's excuses (18.73, 76). Khidr resists companionship with Moses both before and during their journey. On his side, Moses was impatient, swayed by personal motives, and misunderstood Khidr's intentions. Khidr made excuses and resisted companionship with Moses by accusing Moses of impatience and lack of knowledge. Khidr knew Moses was the most noble (*akram*) of creation, but also boldly stubborn. This stubbornness is explained more fully in Ruzbihan's discussion of Qur'an 18.78 (cf. IV.5.10 below) where he suggests that Khidr was considering the fact that Moses had once punched out the eye of the angel of death. Considering Moses' stubbornness, Khidr was frightened by the prospect of companionship with Moses. For this reason he rejected Moses by challenging him with the words, "You will not be able to be patient with me." (18.67)

IV. 5. 2. Ruzbihan interprets Khidr's challenge to Moses (18.67, 68, 72, 75) as an act of teaching by Khidr that knowledge is related to patience and lack of patience is related to ignorance.

IV. 5. 3. Khidr perceived the limits of Moses' patience. First, Moses patience and his attainment of knowledge are based in the exoteric ethical and religious

principles of Islamic law (*shari'a*). How well can Moses live by these principles? Further, Khidr also perceived that Moses was drowned in the sea of the beauty of truth such that he had reached the limits of the form of outward observances: Moses had reached the limit (*farigh*) of forms of outward observance and the evaluation of benefit and harm. Khidr recognized these factors as defining Moses' limits. In this sense, Moses had reached a degree of spiritual experience beyond his own endurance; Khidr's companionship would have increased this discrepancy and overtaxed his patience. (p. 592)

IV. 5. 4. 1. Ruzbihan suggests that Khidr said, "You will not be able to be patient with me" (18.67a) to clarify that it is not the role of a saint (*wali*) to impart insight (*yatafarisu*) to a prophet. (p. 593) Ruzbihan's sense that the saint cannot impart inspired insight (*firasa*) may conform to al-Qushayri's notion that Khidr's knowledge is unteachable.<sup>44</sup> This sense underlies al-Qushayri's use in his *Risala* of al-Wasiti's description of inspired insight:

Al-Wasiti stated, "Insight consists of radiant lights in the heart, enabling gnosis to carry secrets in the unseen realms from one hidden realm to another, such that one may see things in the way that God displays them to him, so that he may speak about the innermost part of creation."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Al-Qushayri, *Lata'if al-Isharat*, p. 408.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Qushayri, *Principles of Sufism*, 224.

Although al-Wasiti conceives of “speak[ing] about the innermost part of creation,” the mode of this discernment – lights and secrets in unseen and hidden realms -- eludes language

IV. 5. 4. 2. Adopting al-Qushayri’s observation (p. 411), Ruzbihan suggests that, by questioning Moses’ ability to be patient (18.67-68), Khidr purposefully distanced himself in order to maintain his companionship with God, rather than lose divine companionship through companionship with Moses.

IV.5.5. Moses acted with proper conduct (*adab*) and sought Khidr’s approval (18.66, 69) because Moses knew patience (*sabr*) is only attained through God. Ruzbihan develops al-Qushayri’s observation that Moses demonstrated the link between patience and seeking the will of God (p. 408). In his choice of syntax, Ruzbihan evokes a verse from the Qur’an: “Be patient for your patience is only in God.” (16.127)

IV.5.5.1. Ruzbihan quotes Faris who distinguishes the knowledge and stations of Khidr and Moses:

IV.5.5.1.1. Khidr’s knowledge is directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*‘ilm ladunni*) from one unseen realm to another. Moses’ knowledge at that time is the result of effort (*taklif*) and proof (*istidlal*).

IV.5.5.1.2. Khidr’s station is one firmly established in unveiling and witnessing (*maqam al-kashf wa-’l mushahada*). Moses’s station is one of cultivation or moral training (*maqam al-ta’dib*).

IV.5.5.1.3 Faris also suggests that when Khidr became the instructor of Moses, Khidr thought little of him in the sense that Khidr did not want to “turn away from his station.” Two characteristics of Khidr’s station are relevant:

(1) his witnessing of the vision of the essence (*ru'ya al-dhat*) and the attributes (*sifat*) as these inform the apparent destinies [of creatures].

(2) Khidr’s station reflects his “exalted status with God and the greatness of his knowledge of the divine characteristics (*nu'ut/ sing. na'at*) and attributes (*sifat*).” (see III.7.5.c.,d., and e above)

IV.5.6. Ruzbihan examines Moses’ practice of the “duty of discipleship” (*haqq al-mutaba'at*). Moses request to follow (18.66) and Khidr’s act of deflecting the request (18.67-68) suggest that Moses does not need to ask this question. In fact, Ruzbihan asserts, “it is the duty of discipleship to remain silent during the spiritual activity (*tasarruf*) of the teacher.”

IV.5.7. (18.70) The difference between training (*ta'dib*) and instruction (*ta'lim*) explains part of the reason Moses should not ask questions. Ruzbihan quotes al-Husri on the question of Moses’ questions. Al-Husri says that Khidr knew Moses’ insufficiencies (*qusur*) from his questioning. The reason that Khidr stipulated that Moses not ask is that although Moses has a “higher, more complete knowledge,” Moses sought Khidr for training (*ta'dib*), not instruction (*ta'lim*).

Al-Husri [Abu'l-Hasan 'Ali b. 'Abd al-Ghani al-Fihri (420/1029-488/1095)] said Khidr knew the insufficiencies (*qusus*) of [Moses'] knowledge from the nature of Moses' questioning and indeed [Moses] asked him [urgently] for cultivation (*ta'dib*), not for instruction (*ta'lim*). So [Khidr] said to [Moses], "If you follow me, don't ask me concerning anything." [18.70] because your knowledge [i.e., prophethood] is higher and more complete and indeed you sought me for cultivation (*ta'dib*), not for instruction (*ta'lim*) in an exceptional state.<sup>46</sup>

IV.5.8. Ruzbihan explains the two forms of guidance:

- (1) the "path of asking" (*tariq al-su'al*) and
- (2) the "station of acquisition" (*maqam al-kasb*)

IV.5.8.1. The refusal of hospitality (18.77b) represents the descent from the path of asking ["they asked"] to the station of acquiring ["he found a wall"]. The path of asking is the way of the of those intoxicated in God or "drawn to God" (*majdhubin*); the station of acquisition is the way of sober travelers (*salikin*). The intoxicated – those who ask -- are unable to work or engage in acquisition. One in a perfect state (*hal*) abandons both approaches.

IV.5.8.2. Further, Ruzbihan takes the examples that Khidr and Moses continue to "ask" and "take" to mean that neither way prevents the gnostic from attaining the station of divine satisfaction (*rida*) and trust (*tawakkul*).

IV.5.8.3. According to al-Wasiti, as quoted by Ruzbihan, the rejection of hospitality means that Khidr witnessed the lights of the kingdom while Moses witnessed intermediaries (*wasa'it*). Although Ruzbihan does not comment further, al-

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<sup>46</sup> Ruzbihan, *'Ara'is*. p. 593

Wasiti's interpretation may correspond to the difference between the responses of Khidr and Moses: Khidr accepts the rejection and turns to rebuild a wall which he *finds* (suggesting "acquisition" [*kasb*]); Moses, in contrast focuses on the people of the village as "intermediaries" of whom one may – or even must -- *ask* for hospitality.

IV.5.8.4. Khidr explains to Moses that asking from humanity is asking from God. The refuser and giver are one; therefore, it is wise to refrain from anger and look beyond the cause to the Causer. This interpretation may inform al-Wasiti's description of Khidr witnessing the "lights of the kingdom" beyond the forms. Ruzbihan here begins developing a theme he will examine more extensively later: the essential union behind the apparent forms of mediation and expressions of intention (cf. V.1.4.,, below).

IV.5.9. Moses' interest in the reward (*ajr*) blocks his progress. (18.77) His lack of patience contrasts, as Ruzbihan observes, with his ability to forego food patiently on Sinai. Now Ruzbihan notes, Khidr is established (*baqa*) in the stations of the way (*manazil al-tariqa*) while Moses is burning with the fires of longing. His impatience in seeking food shows that he is at the beginning stage, whereas on Sinai, in the station of hearing (*maqam al-sama* ) he had been patient for forty days. Ruzbihan relates Ibn 'Ata's interpretation that since self-consciousness and personal motive invalidate an act; Khidr separated himself from Moses when Moses raised the issue of a reward



(*ajr*). Ruzbihan also quotes Junayd's dictum that greed is a darkness which veils souls from the "inner aspects of the [divine] decree." In Ruzbihan's view, Moses projected his own limitations onto Khidr's perfection of knowledge. Ruzbihan again suggests that Khidr could not give Moses an answer – perhaps following al-Qushayri's notion of the unteachability of Khidr's knowledge.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, Khidr finished with Moses and declared their parting.

IV.5.10. Ruzbihan defines Khidr's declaration of parting as a reflection of the mutual testing which strained the companionship of Khidr and Moses. Because Khidr knew Moses' faculty of inner sense and that Moses was being tested in his companionship with him, Khidr wanted to divert Moses from the form of knowledge and action. Ruzbihan proposes that Khidr wanted to avoid a confrontation with Moses, who he knew, had punched out the eye of 'Azra'il, the angel of death.<sup>48</sup> Knowing Moses' severity, and seeking to prevent Moses from acting presumptuously with Khidr -- "one of the masters of the narrative" (*shaykh min ashyakh al-qissa*) – Khidr decided not to disclose answers from the "secret of the secret of the exalted [realm of] lordship."

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<sup>47</sup> Al-Qushayri, *Lata'if al-Isharat*, p. 408.

<sup>48</sup> *Sahih Bukhari* II. 23. #423

IV.5.11. Ruzbihan quotes Abu-'l-Qasim Nasrabadhi's<sup>49</sup> assertion that because Khidr knew his own limits and Moses' attainment in spiritual formation (*ta'addub*), Khidr parted in order to prevent his own embarrassment.

IV.5.12 Abu Bakr ibn Tahir suggests that Moses, looking at the outer form of the actions, prevented Khidr from doing good and also misjudged Khidr's motive as one of greed.

*V. The essential unity behind the apparent forms of mediation and the expressions of intention*

V.1. The case of the youth (18.80) raises the question of predestination (*qadar*). God could have made him sinless or guided him to truth. Taken literally, Ruzbihan suggests, the verse suggests that acquisition (*iktisab*) -- Khidr's slaying the youth to prevent his destiny from unfolding -- interferes with predestination (*qadar*). But at a deeper level of interpretation, this verse describes essential union (*'ayn al-jam'*): the youth and the slaying are acts of Allah; the command is the command of Allah; the destiny is the destiny of Allah. The perspective of essential union (*'ayn al-jam'*) resolves the apparent duality of thinking that Khidr's acts could violate God's intention. This move preserves God's predestination in the face of apparently autonomous agency on the part of a creature.

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<sup>49</sup> Abu'l-Qasim Ibrahim al-Nasrabadhi (d. 366/977-8)

V.1.1. From the perspective of destiny, God establishes the destiny of the youth. But from the perspective of action, God seems to delete what he decreed. What appear as contradictory actions from our perspective are reconciled in the perspective of essential union (*'ayn al-jam* ): the cause and the Causer are one. (cf. IV.5.8.4., above) Khidr's knowledge that the killing of the youth were destined (*maqdur*) from the pre-eternity of pre-eternity as an act of God signaled to Khidr that his own knowledge of destiny (*qadar*) exceeded the knowledge of Moses. Thus Khidr declared their parting.

V.1.2. Ruzbihan summarizes six reasons for the separation and five reasons Khidr resisted companionship with Moses. First, the six reasons for the separation:

- (1) Moses mentioned rewards. (IV.5.9)
- (2) Khidr's knowledge is unteachable (no answer is possible). (IV. 5.9)
- (3) Khidr was apprehensive about Moses' disposition, especially in light of what he did to 'Azra'il. (IV.5.10)
- (4) Khidr, knowing his own limits, wanted to spare himself embarrassment. (IV.5.11)
- (5) Moses projected Khidr's motive as one of greed. (11.5.12)
- (6) Khidr's knowledge of destiny exceeded that of Moses' knowledge. (V.1.1.)

Ruzbihan presents five reasons why Khidr resisted companionship with Moses:

(1) Khidr was frightened over Moses' nobility and stubbornness. (IV.5.1)

(2) Since Moses' patience and knowledge were based on religious precepts (*shari'a*), his ability to practice patience and apply some forms of knowledge had not yet been tested. (IV.5.3.)

(3) Imparting insight (*tafarrasa*) was not Khidr's responsibility. (IV.5.4.1)

(4) Khidr desired to return to companionship with God. (IV.5.4.2.)

(5) Khidr did not want to turn away from his station of witnessing the vision of the essence and attributes. (IV. 5.5.1.3.)

V.2. The case of the slain youth raises a potential problem inherent in mediators. One is at risk of fixing one's attention on the mediator rather than on the mediated.

V.2.1. Khidr became concerned that the beauty of the youth's face and its light could deter people of truth and knowledge from gazing directly at God. This perspective of Ruzbihan's further increases the tension implicit in Khidr's role as a mediator of unmediated – and unteachable – knowledge. To Ruzbihan, Khidr sought to prevent the misdirection of intimacy toward the particular form of the youth, so that intimacy would be toward God alone. The problem of mediation also defines the

difference between Moses' journey of training and his period of waiting on Sinai. Both al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan assess the difference in Moses' endurance in relation to mediation. In the journey to Khidr, Moses' search for a mediator brings him fatigue. On Sinai, his direct approach to God finds him sustained (cf. II.1, II. 3 above).

V.2.2. Khidr killed in the youth what was other than God and so removed the intermediaries between God and His lovers, prophets, and saints (*awliya*).

V.2.3. Khidr discerned (*tafarras*) the situation of the youth through inspired insight (*firasa*). [cf. IV.5.4.1. above] Ruzbihan considers such insight to be infallible.

V.3. From the perspective of essential union (*'ayn al-jam'*), Khidr's three explicitly different statements of intention (*irada*) are in reality one.

V.3.1. Ruzbihan sees Khidr's statement, "...I intended..." (18.79) as referring to essential union (*'ayn al-jam'*) and unification (*ittihad*). This interpretation would presumably follow from Khidr's act of having eliminated the boat as a distinctively attractive object. His statement, "...We intended..." (18.81) refers to taking on divine attributes (*ittisaf*) and the related condition of expansiveness (*inbisat*). This interpretation seems to follow the substitution of a morally inferior child with one imbued with the divine attributes of purity and mercy. Ruzbihan explains the third statement, "...your Lord intended..." (18.82) in three related expressions:

(1) The statement "...your Lord intended..." is an expression of al-Junayd's formulation of divine unity (*tawhid*): "...the isolation of the eternal from the temporal."<sup>50</sup> (*ifrad al-qidam 'an al-huduth*) The phrase "isolation of the eternal from the temporal" seems to mirror in the abstract the narrative's particular motifs. God wants the two orphaned youths to reach their maturity ("eternal") so that they will be able to retrieve ("isolation") their treasure.

(2) The statement "...your Lord intended..." means "the disappearance (*talashi*) and annihilation (*fana'*) of the one professing unity (*muwahhid*) in the one unified (*muwahhad*). Ruzbihan's gloss corresponds to the definition of *tawhid* by Abu Muhammad al-Ruwaym: "*Tawhid* is the effacement of the characteristics of humanity and the stripping bare of divinity."<sup>51</sup> Ruzbihan's evocation of annihilation (*fana'*) may relate to the phrase within this verse (18.82) in which Khidr disclaims his own apparent agency: "I did not act on my own command."

(3) Ruzbihan explains the statement "...your Lord intended..." as describing the inner state (*batin*) of will (*mashi'a*) which is the "hidden aspect of the attribute which is the secret of the essence." As before, this interpretation of an inner and hidden state parallels the presence of the treasure under the wall. This formulation extends the implications of Ruzbihan's gloss on the first statement, "...I intended..."

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<sup>50</sup> Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 29.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

as an expression of Khidr in the state of essential union. Ultimately, Ruzbihan concludes: “Only Allah exists among [these three expressions of intention].”

V.3.2. Ruzbihan quotes two of Ibn ‘Ata’s interpretations of the three statements of intention.

(1a.) The statement “...I intended...” means that Khidr was inspired in his faculty of inner sense with the question, “Who are you, that you presume to express your own intention?”

(1b.) The statement “...we intended...” continues in the same vein: “Who are you and Moses, that you both presume to express an intention?”

(1c.) The statement “...your Lord intended...” reflects Khidr’s retreat from presuming to impose his own intentions.

(2a.) The statement “...I intended...” refers to compassion (*shafaqa*) upon creation. (2b.) The statement “...we intended...” expresses mercy (*rahma*).

(2c.) The third statement “... your Lord intended...” reflects a return to reality (*haqiqa*).

V.3.3. Ruzbihan cites an interpretation of the three statements of intention by Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj:

(1a.) The first statement, "...I intended..." is the "first station" (*al-maqam al-awwal*) which is "God's ravishing (*istila' al-haqq*) of the individual ego."

(1b.) The second statement, "...we intended..." is a "second station:...discoursing with the servant."

(1c.) The third statement, "...your Lord intended..." is a third station:...a return to the inner [esoteric] through the outer [exoteric]." This statement corroborates Ruzbihan's view (cf. V.3.1.3., above) that the statement, "...your Lord intended..." extends the implications of the statement, "...I intended..." as a more complete expression of essential union: namely, that behind all agency, action, and forms, only God exists. As we have suggested before, the motif of the buried treasure symbolically describes the notion of a return to the inner (buried treasure) from the outer (the wall). Ruzbihan's readers would naturally associate this symbolism with the hadith which reads, "I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known so I created all of the creation."<sup>52</sup>

V.3.4. Applying a rhetoric of ineffability, Ruzbihan articulates his conclusion as a sense in which all oppositions resolve. Ruzbihan's elusive and paradoxical summary displays a rhetorical reenactment of the place "where two seas meet:"

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<sup>52</sup> *Kuntu kanz<sup>am</sup> makhfiyy<sup>am</sup> fa-'hbabtu 'an u'rafa fa-khalaqtu 'l-khalqa lika u'rafa*. Cited in Javad Nurbaksh, *Traditions of the Prophet* Vol. 1 (New York: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1981), 13.



The inwardness of the inwardness becomes within it the outer of the outer. And the absence of the absence becomes the visible (*'iyan*) of the visible. And the visible of the visible becomes the absence of the absence; just as nearness to something through the lower selves (*nufus*) is distance, so the nearness to it in itself is [true] nearness to God.

Amidst this *aporia apophasis* one may sense a parallel with the narrative's final unfolding: the elusive answers to Moses' questions are found on the same river, within the face of the youth, and under Moses' feet. In a very tangible sense then, the narrative lets us feel the unveiling of Ruzbihan's paradox of the union between the seen and the unseen.

**'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (d. 730 A.H./1329 C.E.) Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim**

Following in the footsteps of Ibn 'Arabi (1160-1240), al-Qashani emphasizes the allegorical interpretation (*ta'wil*) of the Qur'an applied to the training of the soul. Although al-Qashani treats many of the same issues as al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan, he departs from their emphasis on the master-disciple relationship to focus on spiritual psychology. The motifs and symbols of the story serve as a map of the soul and its training (*riyada*). The narrative of Khidr and Moses becomes a parable of the progressive training (*riyada*) in which the "domineering soul" (*al-nafs al-ammara*) and the "blaming soul" (*al-nafs al-lawwama*) are tamed and replaced by a "contented soul" (*al-nafs al-mutma'inna*).<sup>53</sup> For al-Qashani, only when the soul is content and the body

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<sup>53</sup> These three stages of the soul are part of a seven-fold model which is first described by Abu 'Abdallah al-Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 857). See Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*. (New York:

comes to rest can one receive this knowledge. Directly-disclosed divine knowledge cannot be achieved through discursive inquiry, but is unveiled in a perfected heart.

I have organized the analysis of al-Qashani's *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*<sup>54</sup> around eleven rubrics:

- (I) Orientation: inner meanings
- (II) Journey: initial tests
- (III) Teacher: Khidr, the sacred intellect
- (IV) Seeker: declaring determination
- (V) Companionship: subtleties, silence, and spiritual states
- (VI) Training: breaking the souls which command and blame
- (VII) Transformation: seeking spiritual food
- (VIII) Tranquillity: building the contented soul
- (IX) Relinquishment: abandoning self-interest
- (X) Understanding: learning through the soul
- (XI) Meanings: extracting the treasure of the heart's gnosis

(I) *Orientation: inner meanings*. Conceding the importance of the explicit meanings (*zahir*) and miracles of the story, al-Qashani announces his objective to extract the inner meanings (*batin*). For al-Qashani, Moses is the heart (*qalb*);<sup>55</sup> the

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Paulist Press, 1996), 171-195. A chart and outline of the seven levels of the soul appears in J. Spencer Trimingham, *ibid.*, 152-157.

<sup>54</sup> 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani (attributed to Muhyi al-Din ibn 'Arabi), *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, ed. Mustafa Ghalib (2 vols.; Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 766-773.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Qashani stresses the interpretive role of the "station of the heart (*maqam al-qalb*)."<sup>55</sup> Only in the station of the heart is gnosis (symbolized by the treasure under the wall) learned. In the station of the heart one apprehends both the universal forms and the particular entities. See sections VII and XI.3.2. below.

servant is the soul (*nafs*) attached to the body. He gives two levels of meaning for the two seas. First, the meeting of the two seas represents the meeting between two realms: the world of the spirit (*ruh*) and the world of the body (*jism*) and the entering of a human being into the station of the heart, represented by salty and sweet water. Before Moses and Joshua joined their spirits and bodies, their food was the physical fish God commanded them to take. On attaining this union, symbolized by reaching the place where two seas meet, they then forgot the fish. Al-Qashani seems to be implying that their forgetting the fish means they have exchanged dependence on physical food for a capacity to eat spiritual food. Al-Qashani later takes up the theme of spiritual food more extensively (cf. section VII below). The fish took its way into the sea of the body. In an uncharacteristically literalist detail, al-Qashani asserts that the species of fish is the same as that which swallowed Dhu'l-Nun (Jonah). (p. 766)

(II) *The journey: initial tests.* Al-Qashani, echoing the hadith account, relates Moses' passing beyond the place where the two seas meet to the point of the onset of fatigue.<sup>56</sup> This fatigue, asserts al-Qashani, is the fatigue and difficulty of giving birth. Moses' request for the meal reflects the difference between his present and past conditions: like daylight compared to the womb. The servant's answer, "Did you see..." is an expression of the soul's nakedness in the moment when its weakness was exposed. The rock where they sit represents the "upper chest for suckling,"

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<sup>56</sup> *Sahih Bukhari* IV.55.23.613.

complementing the theme of birth al-Qashani invoked before. Al-Qashani invokes three motifs of birth and childhood: the womb, nakedness, and suckling. These symbolic associations, not identified in al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan, accord with the water of life motif featured in hadith<sup>57</sup> and popular literature, as we have discussed earlier. Al-Qashani explains Satan's act of causing forgetfulness as a loss of consciousness or mind (*damir*). Borrowing from hadith, al-Qashani reiterates that the forgetting happened when Moses fell asleep.<sup>58</sup> Also following hadith, the servant stays awake. In al-Qashani's professed esoteric (*batin*) interpretation, the soul is awake, while the heart is asleep. In this condition, Satan's insinuations induce the soul to forget the fish. The opening of the water which strikes awe and bewilderment further contributes to the distraction. (p. 767)

(III) *Teacher: Khidr, the sacred intellect.* Moses' searching refers to "rising to perfection (*taraqqiy ila al-kamal*)...through the pursuit of the sacred intellect (*al-'aql al-qudsi*)." Al-Qashani's idiom here evokes, but extends beyond al-Qushayri's and Ruzbihan's articulations of "divine inspiration" and "perfect gnosis." "Retracing their steps," refers for al-Qashani to two realities: (1) "rising to the station of the original nature" (*maqam al-fitra al-ula*); and (2) rising to perfection until finding the sacred intellect. To al-Qashani Khidr is at one level the sacred intellect. The sacred intellect which is the Qur'anic "servant from among God's servants" has been "specially

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., VI. 60. 251.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., IV.55.23.613.

selected with the virtue of caring (*'inaya*) and mercy (*rahma*). That mercy is spiritual perfection: immaterial, indivisibly sacred and pure light. These qualities are all signs (*athar*) that the sacred intellect, personified by Khidr, is close and intimate. Al-Qashani, following al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan, interprets “And We taught him knowledge from Our Presence” (18.65) to mean a sacred, inner knowledge given without the mediation of a human teacher (*ta'lim bashari*). Al-Qashani suggests, but does not stress that this knowledge is unteachable. (p. 768)

(IV) *Seeking: declaring determination.* Moses' request, “May I follow you...” (18.66) represents to al-Qashani a “display of an intention to journey (*suluk*) and rising to perfection,” rather than representing, as for al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan, a model of right conduct toward one's teacher. “You will not be able to bear...” means for al-Qashani that Moses is unaware of hidden matters and spiritual realities. These deficiencies are for al-Qashani a matter of Moses' lack of freedom and the veiling of these subtleties by his own body. As such Moses cannot engage in Khidr's friendship (*murafaqa*). Although al-Qashani includes the issue of friendship with Khidr, he does not follow al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan, in casting that relationship in terms of right conduct (*adab*) towards one's teacher and mentoring companionship (*suhba*). Moses' pledges to remain patient and not disobey are similarly understood as an issue of Moses' own will; al-Qashani, unlike Ruzbihan, does not stress the invocation of “God

willing” as a feature of his analysis. Al-Qashani does not look for the kind of deference celebrated by al-Qushayri. Al-Qashani’s language is one of self-determination:

He [Moses] said, “You will find me, God willing patient.” – due to the power of *my preparation* and *my perseverance* on the quest. “And I will not disobey you in anything.” – due to *my directing myself* toward you and due to *my purity and sincerity of my intention*.<sup>59</sup>

(V) *Companionship: subtleties, silence, and spiritual states.* Al-Qashani adds that the entire dialogue is conducted in the “language of a spiritual state.” This harks back to Khidr’s challenge to Moses that he would not be able to be patient: the journey will involve hidden matters and spiritual realities. At this point al-Qashani begins to address the etiquette of the master-disciple relationship as one of “spiritual training” (*riyada*). Khidr’s statement, “If you would follow me...” refers to “traveling the path of perfection” (*suluk tariq al-kamal*). “So do not ask anything of me...” relates the principles of “emulation” (*iqtida*), the “way of deeds,” “spiritual training” (*riyada*), “ethics,” and “efforts” (*mujahadat*) as the basis of their relationship. These qualities distinguish the knowledge imparted in spiritual training from the knowledge imparted through questions and answers. Khidr’s stipulation, “...until I make mention of it to you” underscores the need to *postpone* or *defer* understanding until Moses achieves freedom through his training by works of transformation and heartfulness. Al-Qashani will develop this theme later in related terms: achieving this knowledge

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<sup>59</sup> al-Qashani, *Tafsir*, p. 768. I have added italics to emphasize this point.

requires that the soul be contented, the body comes to rest,<sup>60</sup> and that one has arrived at the station of the heart.<sup>61</sup> (pp. 768-769)

(VI) *Training: breaking the souls which command and blame.* The boat represents the body as a vehicle for training (*riyada*). Breaking the boat weakens the body's resistance to God. This weakening of resistance to God, symbolized by the crack in the boat comes through training and eating less. Moses conceives of the drowning as an act of destruction through returning the animal and vegetable natures to the sea of primordial matter (*hayula* [Ar.]; *hyle* [Gk.]; *prima materia* [L.]). Moses' protest over the drowning represents a "manifestation of the ego (*nafs*)," and the heart's sympathy for the ego's struggle, and the experience of deprivation and impoverishment. Khidr's reminder, "Did I not tell you you would not be able to have patience with me?" serves as a warning and caution to Moses that one needs more resolution (*'azima*) for this journey. Moses first excuse, "Do not blame me that I forgot..." is an excuse uttered from the station of the blaming soul (*al-nafs al-lawwama*). Al-Qashani describes the training which Khidr gives to Moses not so much from the perspective of the teaching relationship, but rather, with a special emphasis on the spiritual psychology of that training. (p. 769)

(VII) *Transformation: seeking spiritual food.* The rebellious youth whom Khidr slays represents the ego (*nafs*) which commands to evil (*amara bi-l-su'*). Killing

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 771; see section X below.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 772 (18.82); see section XI.3.2.

the youth refers to suppressing the ego's wrath and desire. Moses' protest over killing a "pure soul" reflects an "overly compassionate heart." Moses' retraction and compensation, "If I ask you anything..." represents recognition of his sin (*dhanb*), a recognition which results from transformations taking place in the blaming soul (*al-nafs al-lawwama*). Both of Moses' excuses represent for al-Qushayri expressions of the blaming soul. The "people of the village" refers to "bodily powers." Khidr and Moses' request for hospitality symbolizes a request for "spiritual food" which is beyond the scope of bodily powers. Al-Qashani's interpretation of the request for hospitality as a request for spiritual food harks back to his initial interpretation of the forgotten fish as a sign that Moses and his servant had surpassed the need for physical food (see section I above). As al-Qashani explains, receiving spiritual food ("hospitality") from the bodily powers ("people of the village") is as unlikely as deriving universal meaning from partial understanding.<sup>62</sup> Spiritual food comes from the sacred lights and manifestations of the beauty and majesty within divine gnosis. Al-Qashani takes this episode of the refusal of food and drink to mean that the training of the commanding soul (breaking the boat and killing the youth) has effected a transformation: Moses and Khidr have shifted from seeking earthly food ("under their feet") to seeking luminous divine food. In particular what made this transformation possible was the calming and redirecting of the bodily powers and senses. (p. 770) Al-Qushayri will further develop

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<sup>62</sup> See section XI.3.2 below where al-Qashani identifies that the successful combination of universal and particular meaning is accomplished in the "station of the heart" (*maqam al-qalb*) beyond discursive inquiry.



this point to explain that gnosis is only received when the soul is calm and the body subdued (p. 771, see section X below).

(VIII) *Tranquility: building the contented soul.* Following al-Qashani's description, the training can replace the commanding soul and blaming soul with a soul of contentment. For al-Qashani, the wall symbolizes the "contented soul" (*al-nafs al-mutma'inna*). The wall's solidity reflects the stillness and stability in the soul effected by the training (*riyada*) symbolized by the motifs of breaking the boat and killing the youth. The killing of the youth represents the death of the commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammara*). This death made possible the establishment, symbolized by rebuilding the wall, of the soul of contentment. The solidity of the wall also represents quelling the stirrings in the soul and will. The motif of the wall "on the verge of destruction" points to the soul's weakness and corresponds to Khidr's will to first demolish, and then rebuild, the soul into a soul of contentment. Rebuilding and straightening the soul means establishing perfections and virtues in place of vices. (p. 770)

(IX) *Relinquishment: abandoning self-interest.* In advocating taking a reward or wages (*ajr*) for rebuilding the wall, Moses discloses a transformation in his heart toward Khidr, but not in his soul. In his soul, Moses still needs to relinquish the expectation of reward. Such focus on rewards distorts "the cultivation of divine ethics" in which actions should be done for their own sake, not for self-interested motives. In particular, al-Qashani asserts, the rewards of building the soul through the work of spiritual training are a vice. The goal instead, is the unveiling (*inkishaf*) of the

characteristics of the soul to disclose the “realm of light” with its “hidden meanings.” Al-Qashani also describes the goal as becoming characterized by “the Divine Attributes” and “coming into reality in God after passing away in God (*fana fih*).” These goals require abandoning self-interested motives, expectations of rewards, or recompense. For al-Qashani, Khidr’s declaration of parting signifies the difference between Khidr’s station (*maqam*) and state (*hal*) and Moses’ station and state. (p. 771)

(X) *Understanding: learning from the soul.* Al-Qashani applies his model of the development of the contented soul to the question of what it means for Moses to learn the ultimate meaning (*ta’wil*). Accepting such depths of meaning and encountering the unseen depends on the soul being contented and the bodily powers coming to rest. As al-Qashani specifies, Khidr prohibited Moses from asking about the encounter with the Unseen. This implies -- even if al-Qashani does not directly state it -- that the encounter with the unseen cannot be granted through asking. As al-Qashani indicates, Khidr’s words, “...until I mention it to you...” mean that Khidr will only tell Moses if he is “ready to receive the meanings and the types of gnosis.” (p. 771)

(XI) *Explanations: extracting the treasure of the heart’s gnosis.* Al-Qashani interprets the symbols and motifs which arise from Khidr’s explanations.

(XI.1) *The commanding soul.* The boat travels on a sea of primordial matter, representing the body with its external sense and vegetive powers. God calls its

ferryman “poor ones” (*masakin*) for their enduring passivity (*sukun*),<sup>63</sup> their earthiness, their being too weak to oppose the heart<sup>64</sup> on its journey, and their submissiveness to the heart. They symbolize the eternal and internal senses. Al-Qashani interprets the king as the commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammara*). This is al-Qashani’s second symbolic identification of the commanding soul. Previously he identified the rebellious youth as the commanding soul. Khidr’s statement, “I wanted to break it...” refers to the training to subdue the commanding soul. The king’s seizing boats means he dominated the senses by imposing his passions and wishes.

(XI. 2) *The contented soul.* The parents of the youth represent the spirit (*ruh*) and bodily nature (*al-tabi‘at al-jismaniya*), closely paralleling al-Qashani’s initial identification of the meeting of the two seas as the meeting of the world of the spirit (*ruh*) and world of the body (*jism*). The parents are believers, especially in four aspects of belief: (1) they are established in their belief in God’s unity (*tawhid*); (2) they profess obedience to God; (3) they follow the command of God; (4) they submit to what God wants of them. The “fear of grief” means he might have deluged them with overt egotism (*ina’iyya*) which would have stifled the witness of the spirit, and would finally “abolish their worship of God.” The child being an “unbeliever” means he would corrupt himself, his parents, and their religion. The substitution of a new child refers to establishing the contented soul. Al-Qashani interprets two of the

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<sup>63</sup> In Arabic the terms “poor ones” (*masakin*) and passivity (*sakun*) derive from a common root: (s-k-n).

<sup>64</sup> At the beginning (p. 766; cf. Sec. I, above) al-Qashani identified Moses as the heart.

narrative's motifs as the "contented soul:" the new child, and the wall.<sup>65</sup> The new child's better purity means ritual purity and cleanliness. His better mercy refers to greater compassion upon the spirit and body which is more useful and sympathetic. This new child, the "contented soul," can serve as the desired one (*murad*) for his father and grandfather. Al-Qashani here alludes to his being better suited to imparting compassion on the spirit and soul.

(XI.3) *The treasure of gnosis and the Holy Spirit.*

(XI.3.1) *Two intellects.* To al-Qashani the two orphans to whom a treasure has been left represent two intellects, the theoretical and the active. Both are descended from the Holy Spirit (*al-ruh al-quds*). The two intellects become "orphaned" from the Holy Spirit when the body overpowers the soul or the heart.

(XI.3.2) *The treasure of gnosis.* Al-Qashani deems the treasure to be gnosis (*ma'rifa*). Gnosis, he stipulates is only learned in the "station of the heart" (*maqam al-qalb*). This qualification echoes al-Qashani's earlier discussion of gnosis as outside the limits of discourse.<sup>66</sup> In the station of the heart, when the heart is perfected, one combines the apprehension of the universals (*kulliyat*) and the particulars (*juz'iyat*).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Al-Qashani selects the wall as a symbol of the contented soul on p. 770. See section VIII above.

<sup>66</sup> See al-Qashani, p. 771 (18.70) and section X above.

<sup>67</sup> In his discussion of Khidr and Moses' request for food (p. 770 [18.77]; see section VII above) al-Qashani pointed out the incongruity between their request for spiritual food and the inability of the people of the village who symbolize bodily powers to provide spiritual food. There he pointed out that an analogy to this incongruity would be to attempt to extract universal meaning from partial cognition. In this passage, al-Qashani identifies that the successful combination of universal and

Those who persevere extract this treasure. To support his interpretation, al-Qashani alludes to the long-standing tradition that the treasure has been interpreted as a text containing knowledge.<sup>68</sup>

(XI.3.3) *The two interpretations and the Holy Spirit.* The two orphans refer to two interpretations (*ta'wilain*). Their father, whom al-Qashani has already interpreted as the Holy Spirit, is a righteous person (*salih*). To al-Qashani this shows that the two interpretations have been preserved for the Holy Spirit.

### ***Conclusion: the Conduct of Companionship***

Al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan share an interpretive agenda which emphasizes the themes of right conduct (*adab*) and spiritual companionship (*suhba*) as the keys to understanding and applying the story of Khidr and Moses to the master-disciple relationship. In his interpretation of the story, al-Qushayri stresses the validity of discipleship (*suhba*) by showing that it is based on patience and obedience. This obedience is warranted as a deferral to a higher order of knowledge. Khidr's knowledge is direct (*'ilm ladunni*), divinely inspired (*ilham*), and unveiled (*kashf*). It is a knowledge of divine decree (*hukm*) outside the limits of exoteric knowledge (*'ilm*). And

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particular meaning is accomplished in the station of the heart beyond discursive inquiry. This parallels al-Qashani's earlier discussion (p. 771 [18.78], see section X above) that the interpretation (*ta'wil*) can only be received when the "soul is contented and the bodily powers come to rest." (p. 771)

<sup>68</sup> Al-Tabari transmits the interpretation that the treasure is knowledge (*'ilm*) either written on pages (*suhuf*) or inscribed on a gold tablet (*lawh min dhahab*). The majority consensus interprets the treasure as knowledge (*'ilm*) in one form or another. (al-Tabari, *Jami'*, sections 23255-23266).

it is Moses' act of imposing stipulations based on the conditions of his knowledge (*shart al-'ilm*) which leads to his parting with Khidr.

For the seeker to acquire direct knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) under the auspices of a teacher requires facing what I call the paradox of mediation. This term, the paradox of mediation, describes al-Qushayri's observation that Moses has asked to be taught something that was not transmitted from a human teacher in the first place. For al-Qushayri, Ruzbihan, and al-Qashani, Khidr's knowledge cannot be learned through instruction (*ta'lim*), but can only be learned through mentoring companionship (*suhba*) and the proper conduct (*adab*) of that relationship. Right conduct (*adab*) and companionship (*suhba*) are the medium for transmitting the knowledge. Khidr's training of Moses involves action (*tasarruf*) and silence more than words. This simple observation that Khidr's pedagogy is one of silence and action informs the interpretations of al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan. Moses acquires his knowledge by watching in silence and bearing with Khidr's intolerable actions. As al-Qushayri concludes, Moses' insistence on explanation was incompatible with the need to wait for unveiling. Since Moses' process of learning is like a journey (*safar at-ta'dib* [journey of moral training]), no description of the map can substitute for the actual traveling.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> A fuller sense of the teaching act as indescribable might be gleaned by borrowing insights from Kenneth Burke's theory of rhetoric. Burke describes speech acts with a pentadic model whose elements, while symbolic, are non-verbal and focused on action. Burke argues that human communication occurs in a matrix of five components: (1) the scene; (2) the act; (3) agent; (4) agency; (5) purpose. This "dramatic pentad," as Burke calls it includes discursive speech but identifies and involves the essential factors of the transaction between Khidr and Moses which extend beyond speech.

Ruzbihan identifies this dichotomy between spiritual training and conceptual mediation or instruction, when he critiques Moses' questioning as a sign of Moses' insufficiencies. Questions, says Ruzbihan, are appropriate to instruction (*ta'lim*), but not to this training (*ta'dib*). This terminology echoes the emergent distinction between two types of masters in Sufism by the 4<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> centuries: the teaching master (*shaykh al-ta'lim*) and the spiritual director (*shaykh al-tarbiyya*) who is also known, even more appropriately as the teaching companion (*shaykh al-suhba*). Trimmingham stresses the distinction between the directing shaykh, who is one's "true guide" and instructing shaykhs:

A clear distinction is made between one's true guide – *shaykh al-tarbiyya* (upbanging), or *shaykh as-suhba* (discipleship) – and the various *shuyukh al-ta'lim* (instructors) whose courses one has followed....[The *shaykh as-suhba* ] is generally, though not necessarily, the initiator into the *silsila* covering both *ijaza*, *irada*, that of the *murid*, and *ijaza 't-tabarruk*, the permission which links with the shaykh's *baraka*.<sup>70</sup>

Ruzbihan adds another interpretive frame to explain the separation: the distinction between the enraptured Sufi (*majdhub*) and the methodical traveler (*salik*). The enraptured one asks; the methodical traveler acquires. In his asking, Moses gets caught in the particular situation of the villager's hospitality as the means of his survival. Khidr, by contrast, moves through each circumstance acquiring what is given. Using this model of enraptured and methodical mystics, Ruzbihan implicitly makes

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Burke's model allows us to adopt the perspectives of the Sufi commentators as continuous with, and therefore, more obviously relevant to more common forms of encounter. See Kenneth Burke, *The Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), xv-xxiii, 127-317.

<sup>70</sup> J. Spencer Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 192.

use of the verbal detail that Khidr “finds” the wall. Ruzbihan observes that while Moses sets conditions for the outcome of his search, Khidr takes what he “finds,” because Khidr looks beyond the worldly phenomena to the “divine lights.”

Ruzbihan reads the story of Moses’ journey with Khidr as teaching that personal motives impede pure action. This issue which all three commentators touch on, though Ruzbihan most explicitly, parallels the challenge famous in the Bhagavad Gita, which Krishna places on his disciple Arjuna: he must act but not be attached to the fruits of his action (*sarvakarmaphalatyaga*).<sup>71</sup> Thus Ruzbihan suggests among his six reasons for the separation between Khidr and Moses that Khidr understood that personal motives invalidate action and greed veils souls from knowing the divine decree.

Al-Qashani, on the other hand, minimizes the relevance of the story to the master-disciple relationship. For al-Qashani Khidr is a symbol of the sacred intellect (*al-‘aql al-qudsi*), the noetic faculty (*nous*) which directly apprehends universals, and receives prophecy. The spiritual companionship between Khidr and Moses is a metaphor for traveling the path to perfection and the establishment of the contented soul (*al-nafs al-mutma’inna*).

Al-Qashani’s focus on psychology leads to his greater interest in the details of the story of Khidr and Moses. He develops more of the story’s details than the other

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<sup>71</sup> Bhagavad Gita 2.47, 51; 3.25; 5.8; 12.12; 18.2. See Barbara Stoler Miller, trans. *The Bhagavad Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1986).



two commentators in his more densely allegorical reading. While al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan skip over verses 61-64 which include the motifs of the fish, the rock, and Satan's prompting of forgetfulness, al-Qushayri finds these motifs meaningful symbols of the soul's journey. Among the three commentators, many motifs are discussed only by al-Qashani. This is in part because al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan emphasize interpreting the master-disciple relationship, for which the actual encounter and journey between Moses and Khidr provides the material. For al-Qashani, by contrast, the entire narrative is rich in resources for an allegory of the soul. This is not to say that al-Qashani ignores the story as an allegory of the master-disciple relationship. In his exegesis of the verse, "If you would follow me...so do not ask anything of me" (18.70) he describes the teaching relationship as conducted through "emulation," "action," "spiritual training," "ethics" and "efforts." This list defines some of the distinction between the directing shaykh and the instructing shaykh.

Khidr's command, "Don't ask." (*la tas'alni*) and his style of teaching through emulation (*iqtida*), with its direct acts and silence are mirrored in Eugen Herrigel's Zen archery teacher:

Demonstration, example; intuition, imitation – that is the fundamental relationship of instructor to pupil....Shunning long-winded instructions and explanations, the latter [the teacher] contents himself with perfunctory commands and does not reckon on any questions from the pupil.<sup>72</sup>

Al-Qashani's partial internalization of the literal story of two people into two aspects of the self, is only the most radical expression of an interpretive strategy

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<sup>72</sup> Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery* (New York: Vantage Books, 1953, 1981).

developed by all three commentators. The literal events of property destruction and murder render the potential for Khidr to serve as an exemplar problematic. By allegorizing the events of the drowning and slaying as aspects of the soul's training, al-Qashani circumvents this difficulty. Ruzbihan moves toward allegorization most explicitly in his assessment of the substitution of the child as the attribution of divine attributes.

Levels of irony permeate the exegetical work of our commentators. In these readings, appeals to the texts of the Qur'an and Hadith serve to support what is asserted as the superior authority of direct, and therefore, non-textual experience. A narrative in words becomes sharpened to a point of catachresis: while companionship (*suhba*) and its journey of training (*safar al-ta'dib*) can create certain conditions for learning, the unveiling (*kashf*) of directly-disclosed divine knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) comes by divine inspiration (*ilham*) and is therefore ultimately beyond both discursive inquiry and human effort. In this narrative about a mediator figure, all three commentators approach a the paradox of mediation: the mediator's knowledge cannot be transmitted; it can only be unveiled by God to a student whose soul has been made ready through a process of mentoring companionship.

And it is this lack of resolution about the mediator's role that returns us to an unexamined question at the very heart of the story of Khidr and Moses: Did Khidr *succeed* in imparting the true meaning (*ta'wil*) of these events to Moses? Does the fact

that Khidr communicated that *ta'wil* to Moses mean that Moses also *received* it? And if Moses did receive this lesson was it not likely in great part due to the fact that the lesson came through direct experience – through directly witnessing Khidr's acts? Perhaps Ruzbihan gives us the clearest opening into recognizing the possibility that Moses succeeded at receiving the true interpretation when he tells us that from the perspective of essential union (*'ayn al-jam'*) the mediator and the mediated are one:" "where two seas meet" there is a reconciliation of the dualities of inner and outer, absent and visible.

Another way of evaluating how Sufi commentators used the story of Khidr and Moses in illuminating the master-disciple relationship, is to consider Khidr's appearances in hagiographical material. In the next chapter we consider narratives of Khidr's involvement with Sufi saints, sages, and masters. In these accounts Khidr appears to both masters and disciples and becomes directly involved in the matters of following and submitting to a teacher.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### KHIDR AS THE MIRROR AND MODEL OF THE MASTER IN SUFI HAGIOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE

As Ruzbihan Baqli observed in his *tafsir*, Moses's companionship with Khidr was a test from God and a model for the disciple in following Sufi masters.

[God] tested him [Moses] through companionship with Khidr, in order to straighten the way (*tariq*), to establish the tradition (*sunna*) in following the masters (*masha'ikh*) so that he would be a model (*uswa*) for the aspirants (*muridān*) and for those who seek by serving the masters of the way (*ashyakh al-tariqa*)<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, in various Sufi hagiographies Khidr is typically presented as a model for the *shaykh* in his role as spiritual guide or *murshid*. Like the *murshid*, Khidr mediates the divine presence in human expression, challenges and tests the aspirant, and trains him or her in the development of innate capacities for accessing inner knowledge and the experience of divine mercy. Like the *murshid*, Khidr shows discernment and insight (*firasa* [*diakresis*]) into the disciples' heart. Khidr models the two axes of human proximity to God: as the bearer of inner knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*), Khidr stands as the

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<sup>1</sup> Ruzbihan b. Abi Nasr al-Fasa'i al-Daylami al-Baqli al-Shirazi, Sadr al-Din Abu Muhammad, *'Ara'is al-bayan fi haqa'iq al-qur'an / The Brides of Explanation on the Realities of the Qur'an*. Cawnpore (1285/1868-9) Calcutta 1300/1883; Karachi (1310/1892-3) (Arabic Lithographs), p. 592

“elect of the elect” (*khass min khawass*). As the bearer of divine compassion (*rahma min ladunna*) Khidr represents the quality of sainthood (*wilaya/walaya*) the capacity to serve as a human point through which God sends divine compassion upon creation. As modeled by Khidr, the training in which the *murshid* engages the disciple lies beyond the discursive realm and the conditions (*shart/shurut*) of conventional knowledge. As such it is called “unveiling” (*kashf*). This unveiling reflects not the accumulation of external knowledge but the discovery of already-present gnosis made possible through the patient training of the soul as it moves through the stages of the soul’s potential evolution, beginning with the domineering soul (*nafs al-ammara*) proceeding to the blaming soul (*nafs al-lawwama*) and, like both the substitute child and the wall which Khidr rebuilt, proceeding to a restoration as a soul dwelling in contentment (*nafs al-mutma’inna*).

Through his visitations, Khidr can serve as either a model for or a test of one’s allegiance to God and the Prophet Muhammad. In considering the relationship of Khidr as such a model, Vincent Cornell observes:

In later Sufi traditions Khidr most commonly appears as a harbinger for the esoteric knowledge that the seeker derives from gnosis and is thus a pivotal figure in the concept of *al-irsan al-kamil*, the paradigmatic or “perfect man.” ... The Qur’anic figure of Khidr, stripped of its later association with the prophet Elijah (Ilyas) appears in the above account [the Qur’anic narrative in Sura al-Kahf 18.60-83] as nothing less than the paradigm of the Sufi shaykh, while the prophet Moses, who normally would be regarded as superior in rank to a mere *wali Allah*, in reality serves as his disciple. Seen in this light, it is easy to understand how Khidr came to epitomize the *philosophia perennis* or Hermetic tradition for generations of Sufis throughout the Islamic world. For early Sufis in both the Muslim East and the West, Khidr most commonly appeared as the Shaykh of Shaykhs and Supreme Spiritual Guide— the paradigmatic possessor of insight (*basira*) and esoteric wisdom (*hikma*).<sup>2</sup>

In this assessment, Cornell clearly underscores the paradigmatic role of Khidr as the model of the shaykh. The significance of Khidr is further illuminated by the phenomenon to which Cornell attests, namely that of the replacement of Khidr as a model of the Spiritual Guide by Muhammad Rasul Allah:

After the sixth/twelfth century, when the efforts of al-Ghazali and earlier “orthodox” mystics to harmonize Sufism with Islamic legalism had reached full fruition, Khidr began to lose his axial position in Sufi doctrine and began to be replaced as a model for esoteric spirituality by the Prophet Muhammad himself, who was now seen as the ultimate synthesis of saintly and prophetic attributes.<sup>3</sup>

In his expanded study of Moroccan saints, Cornell explores al-’Azafi’s application of Khidr’s paradigm to the case of the illiterate saint Abu Yi’izza. This application served to illustrate that

[T]his legendary purveyor of perennial wisdom [i.e., Khidr], although denied the status of prophethood by the majority of Muslim opinion, was nonetheless able, as a *wali Allah*, to surpass the Prophet Moses in his understanding of the mysteries that lie beyond mundane perception. The most important thing about him for al-’Azafi was that he could surpass a prophet in his own separate domain of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vincent J. Cornell, “Mirrors of Prophethood: The Evolving Image of the Spiritual Master in the Western Maghrib from the Origins of Sufism to the End of the Sixteenth Century.” (PhD. Diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp. 79-80.

These cases illustrate the role of Khidr as a legitimating model for the reconstruction and attribution of spiritual authority. Cornell describes Khidr's role in opening the way for new figures and modes of authority outside the lines of prophets and revelation as "hermetic":

[A]l-Khidr is a famous hermetic figure of Islamic folklore who is believed to return in every age to reaffirm the truth of divine inspiration.<sup>5</sup>

This observation articulates two features of Khidr's persona. First, Khidr embodies "divine inspiration" [*ilham*], a category of knowledge which complements, rather than challenges prophecy. Second, Khidr participates in a "hermetic" mode of transmission which cultivates the experience of inner knowledge, or gnosis.

The initiatic transmissions of Khidr and Hermes both share a common place in the broader context of religion in late antique Mediterranean and Near East culture. The figure of Khidr deserves to be characterized as "hermetic," not only in the general sense as 'secret,' but also in the more precise sense of the late-antique and Islamic Hermetic traditions.<sup>6</sup> Both Khidr and Hermes share a special provenance over issues of initiation, interpretation, immortality, and transformation. In popular lore, both Khidr and Hermes are travelers' patrons. Both are spiritual guides who personify the questions of crossing boundaries, between the human and the divine, paradox,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of the Hermetic dimension of Muslim culture and philosophy, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Hermes and Hermetic Writings in the Islamic World," in idem, *Islamic Life and Thought* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), 102-119.

transformation and immortality.<sup>7</sup> As we have seen, works such as the *tafsirs* of at-Tabari and Ruzbihan share with the *Corpus Hermeticum* (Books I and XI in particular) a sense of the transformation of a human being into an extraordinary being: Khidr and Hermes both achieve an apotheosis in gnosis and an exceptional or extraordinary spiritual station. Khidr and Hermes both share a place among immortal beings: Khidr finds the water of eternal life (*Abu Hayat*); Hermes is the *keryx athanaton*, the “messenger of the deathless.” As we shall discuss below, for Ibn ‘Arabi, among others, Khidr and the Prophet Idris, often identified as Hermes Trismegistus, belong to the group Ibn ‘Arabi recognized among the solitary ones (*afrad*) as the four immortal saintly pillars (*awtad*).<sup>8</sup>

As a figure for our work, Khidr stands where two seas meet: on the Islamic side, his typology informs an understanding of prophecy and sainthood; within the broader context of the world of late antiquity, his typology complements an

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<sup>7</sup> Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Late Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). See especially pp. 104-115, 147-149. Fowden describes a Hermetic *paideia* in which an inspired master-teacher initiates his circle of students into the experience of *gnosis*, a moment of liberating rebirth, the illumination of self knowledge and divine knowledge, and ascension. These schools are identified with the figure of Hermes Trismegistus, a synthesis of Thoth and Hermes. For the teaching discourses of this tradition, see Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For an assessment of the ubiquity of Hellenistic religion and culture in general and of the Hermetic Tradition in particular in the areas in which Islam arose, see Gary W. Bowerstock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997). See especially pp. 36-37, 43, 58-60, 71-82. See also Bowerstock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: the Life of Ibn ‘Arabi* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 65-66.



understanding of the inclusion and transformation of Hellenistic traditions within Islam.

*Indications of the Significance of Khidr in Sufi Hagiographies*

Between the account of Khidr and Moses in Qur'an and Hadith to the examination of specific tafsirs, there lie numerous instances of Khidr in Sufi hagiographies. These range from the briefest and most elliptical ('Ibn Warraq) to the most detailed and explicit (Ibn 'Arabi and Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi). In the Sufi hagiographies we glean the continuous stress on the companionship between Khidr and Moses as it is exemplified in the *tafsirs*.

The journey with or visitation by Khidr has been valued and widely reported, especially among Sufis, as a sign of spiritual attainment. The following cases of reports of visitations by Khidr exemplify the role and significance of this spiritual guide. These cases of Khidr's role in hagiographical constructions indicate the extent to which Khidr participates in or contributes to the biographical image of various shaykhs and at times of the relationship of spiritual guidance between shaykh and disciple.

*Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Adham of Balkh (d. 166 / 783)*

In the beginning of his hagiographical portrait of this prince-turned-saint, al-Hujwiri describes Ibrahim as a “disciple of the Apostle Khidr.”<sup>9</sup> According to the account in Farid ad-din Attar’s *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*,<sup>10</sup> Ibrahim Adham of Balkh was awakened to the path of sainthood by three events, one of which was a visit from Khidr. The night before Khidr’s visit, Ibrahim had been visited by a man who appeared on his roof, who when challenged by the prince, explained that he was seeking his lost camel on the roof-- a task only as unlikely as seeking for God in the robes and couches which accompany a prince’s life. Khidr appears the next day, “a man with awful mien,” who blazes through the court and stands before the king. Calling the court a “caravanserai,” Khidr explains that generations pass before the throne, but none stay-- all constantly are entering and departing in a virtual caravanserai.<sup>11</sup>

On his way to Mecca, in the desert, Ibrahim is taught *al-ism al-’azam*, the Greatest Name of God. When he utters the Name, he beholds Khidr, who identifies the one who taught him the Greatest Name as David, or according to some manuscripts, Elijah:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Ali bin Uthman al-Hujwiri, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, Translated, R.A. Nicholson, *The Kasf al-Mahjub, The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*. (London: Luzac, 1911) reprinted as *Revelation of the Mystery* (Accord, NY: Pir Publications, 1999), 103.

<sup>10</sup> Farid ad-Din ‘Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*’ Translated, A.J. Arberry, *Memorial of the Saints*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66

In that wilderness I lived for four years. God gave me my eating without any toil of mine. Khidr, the Green Ancient was my companion during that time-- he taught me the Great Name of God.<sup>13</sup>

On the way to his *hajj*, Ibrahim encounters Khidr, and, in praising God, announces that Khidr's presence confirms the success of the journey: "Praise be to God, the journey was blessed, the quester has reached his quest, for such a holy person has come out to meet us."<sup>14</sup>

In the hagiography of Ibrahim we observe Khidr providing an awakening to the transience of earthly life and authority, initiation into the greatest of Divine Names, spiritual sustenance, and confirmation of spiritual attainment. As such, Khidr links the conservative authority of the tradition with the innovation of actually achieving personal realization.

*Abu Yazid al-Bistami* (d. 260 / 874)

This exemplar of ecstatic sufism (*sukr*) gave voice to the practice of *shathiyat* (ecstatic utterance) and was revered as having been "raised up," like Jesus.<sup>15</sup> According to Attar, while Abu Yazid performed a funeral prayer in Tabarestan, Khidr placed his hand on the back of the neck of Abu Yazid. When the mourners returned, Bistami

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<sup>13</sup> Ibrahim ibn Adham, quoted in Cyril Glasse, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp. 224-5.

<sup>14</sup> Attar, *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>15</sup> The concept and tradition of *shathiyat* are examined in Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*. (Albany: SUNY, 1985).

soared into the air.<sup>16</sup> As we shall discuss below, in the *Mathnawi*, Mevlana narrates that al-Bistami once actively sought a living Khidr and witnessed in him the secret of the presence of God in a human being.<sup>17</sup>

*Ruzbihan Baqli (522/1128-606/1209)*

Ruzbihan Baqli of Shiraz lived at a time when the institutional expressions of Sufism were shifting from informal circles and “beginning to become a broadly based social movement.”<sup>18</sup> He guided students at the *ribat* he established in 1165 which served as his hospice and residence; for fifty years he preached at the principle mosque in Shiraz.<sup>19</sup> His attraction to outrageous ecstatic utterance earned him the sobriquet “Doctor Ecstasticus” (*shaykh- i shattah*). His writings include vivid visionary and densely symbolic passages which infuse his work with poetics and paradox.

In chapter four, we explored Ruzbihan’s interpretation of the companionship between Khidr and Moses, the complementary roles of Khidr and Moses, and relative degrees of knowledge and stations. Ruzbihan’s interpretations also apply to spiritual

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<sup>16</sup> Attar, *ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>17</sup> Jalal ad-Din Rumi, *Masnawi-i ma’navi*, ed. R.A. Nicholson as *The Mathnawi of Jalalu’ddin Rumi*, E.J. W. Gibb Memorial, new series (London: Luzac & Co., 1925, 1929, 1933), II. 2231ff.

<sup>18</sup> Ernst, Carl, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism*. (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), p. ix.

<sup>19</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli*, pp. 5-6; *idem.*, “Ruzbihan,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition. Vol. 8, p. 651 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

psychology, degrees of knowledge, and the conduct (*adab*) between spiritual guides and aspirants.

Ruzbihan's visionary diary, *Kashf al-Asrar (The Unveiling of Secrets)* features initiatic scenarios presenting, among other eminent spiritual directors, Khidr.

At that time I was ignorant of the sciences of realities. And I saw [the immortal prophet] Khidr (peace be upon him) and he gave me an apple, and I ate a piece of it. Then he said, 'Eat all of it, for that is how much of it I ate.' And I saw as it were an ocean from the throne to the earth, and I saw nothing but this; it was like the radiance of the sun. My mouth opened involuntarily, and all of it entered into my mouth. I drank until not a drop of it remained.<sup>20</sup>

The oceanic symbolism echoes the vocabulary of the Qur'anic narrative. There Khidr tells Moses that he will not be able to "encompass" (*tuhit*) his knowledge, a word related to the word for ocean (*muhit*). The oceanic symbolism is extended in the *hadith* accounts which narrate that while Moses and Khidr were riding in the boat, a bird dipped its beak into the ocean to demonstrate the relative extent of their collective "seas" of knowledge compared with the knowledge of Allah. In addition, his disciples attest that Rubihan was visited by Khidr.<sup>21</sup>

As Ruzbihan expresses in his tafsir, he understands Khidr's relationship to God as one of "essential union" (*'ayn al-jam'*). '*Ayn al-Jam'*' describes the primordial

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<sup>20</sup> Ruzbihan ibn Abi al-Nasr al-Baqli, *Kashf al-Asrar* (Translated, Carl W. Ernst as *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Spiritual Master.*) (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Parvardigar Press, 1997), 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Tuhfat ahl 'irfan*, pp. 36, 61 in Carl Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism.* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press), 1996, p. 116.

unity in which the individual does not assert his individual existence in opposition to the boundless “ocean of His oneness.”<sup>22</sup>

*Abu ‘Abdallah Muhammad Hakim b. ‘Ali al-Tirmidhi* (d. 318/932)

At least two aspects of al-Tirmidhi’s legacy relate to our considerations concerning Khidr. First, he contributed the terminology of the degrees of sainthood culminating in *khatm al-awliya’* the concept of the “Seal of the Saints,” which continues to inform Sufi understandings of sainthood. Second, his name al-Hakim suggests his interest in Hellenistic philosophy. The themes of saintly authority and supplementary modes of knowledge are both personified in the figure of Khidr.

The question of how knowledge is to be acquired and the nature of that knowledge is underscored in the following hagiographical narrative. Al-Tirmidhi’s decides to remain with his mother to care for her and her affairs, rather than go off to the *madrasa* for education, as his friends did. For this virtuous choice, al-Tirmidhi is rewarded by the appearance of Khidr who offers to teach him daily so that he would “soon outstrip them [his companions who went to the *madrasa*.]”<sup>23</sup> Over the course of three years he comes to recognize his teacher as Khidr, whose role in his life is the reward for pleasing his mother. Such a narrative reciprocally elevates the status of both al-Tirmidhi, who is visited by a distinguished prophetic figure, and of Khidr, whose

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<sup>22</sup> Ruzbihan Baqli, *‘Ara’is al-bayan*, p. 592.

<sup>23</sup> Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, pp. 244-5.

distinctive degree and body of knowledge is confirmed by his success in tutoring such an outstanding Sufi saint. In this episode, Khidr embodies the reward for virtue, as well as the highest degree of knowledge. Al-Tirmidhi's disciple Abu Bakr Warraq reported that Khidr would visit al-Tirmidhi every Sunday and they would hold conversation together.<sup>24</sup> Al-Tirmidhi's spiritual attainment is here emplotted in the event of Khidr's regular visits and training. In another episode, Khidr transports al-Tirmidhi in an extremely short period of time to the wilderness among the Children of Israel where the *Qutb* or axial saint, sets al-Tirmidhi on the throne.<sup>25</sup>

One of al-Tirmidhi's disciples, Abu Bakr Muhammad b. 'Umar al-Warraq (9<sup>th</sup> century C.E.), is charged with the task of tossing al-Tirmidhi's books into the Oxus river. Seeing the esoteric value of the books, Abu Bakr at first hides them and tells al-Tirmidhi he has thrown them in the river. However, when al-Tirmidhi asks what event transpired when he threw the books in, Abu Bakr's lack of report indicates to al-Tirmidhi that the mission had not really been carried out. When he in fact throws the books in the water, a chest opens to receive them. Al-Tirmidhi explains that Khidr had entreated him to turn over books he had composed on the science of Sufism (*'ilm al-tasawwuf*) which were beyond the grasp of human intelligence.

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<sup>24</sup> Hujviri, *Kashf al-Mahjub* p. 141.

<sup>25</sup> Attar, *ibid.*, pp. 244-5.

[Al-Tirmidhi] said [to Abu Bakr al-Warraq]: ‘I composed a book on theology and mysticism which could hardly be comprehended by the intellect. My brother Khidr desired it of me, and God bade the waters bring it to him.’<sup>26</sup>

Khidr dispatched a fish (the animal associated with Khidr from the narrative in the Qur’an) to bring the chest and through that fish Allah brought the chest to Khidr.<sup>27</sup> Again, in these accounts at least three features of Khidr’s symbolism emerge: (1) the farthest horizons of spiritual knowledge; (2) attainment on the part of one who recognizes Khidr’s authority, and (3) testing a disciple’s faith in his shaykh.

Khidr’s appearance also certifies moral development (*akhlaq*) as in the following episode in which the return of Khidr follows an exceptional act of restraint in which al-Tirmidhi “said nothing and swallowed his anger.” When a maidservant accidentally dumped a basin of bath water containing baby excrement on the head of the shaykh, “[i]mmmediately he rediscovered Khidr.”<sup>28</sup> The quality of *sabr* (patient endurance) which al-Tirmidhi displays is a quality mentioned an exceptionally-frequent seven times among the 23 verses of the Qur’anic story of Khidr and Moses..

In addition to these experiences, Abu Bakr al-Warraq recounts the following meeting with Khidr. Seeking to meet Khidr, Abu Bakr goes each day to the cemetery. One day he sees a being with a luminous face who asks him if he wants *suhba* (spiritual conversation). Khidr then points out that he has overlooked his daily *juz’*

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<sup>26</sup> Hujwiri, *ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>27</sup> Attar, *ibid.*, p. 245-266.

<sup>28</sup> Attar, *ibid.*, p. 247; Hujwiri, *ibid.*, p. 141.



recitation.<sup>29</sup> This motif demonstrates in an intimate way that emblem of Khidr's character: inner knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) as a capacity of what Ruzbihan in his tafsir identified as "discernment [of the heart]" (*firasa*).

In his own writing, al-Tirmidhi described the visit by Khidr as one among eight external signs of the saints. Here Khidr's attribute of immortality describes his affinity with all saints of all times:

And they [the Friends of God] converse with Khadir who wanders across the earth on land and sea, in the plains and in the mountains, searching for someone like himself out of passionate longing for him. Khadir's relationship to the Friends of God is a strange one, indeed! In the primordial beginning (*bad'*) at the time of the divine decrees [of destiny] Khadir beheld their special situation. And he desired to have experience of them [on earth] and thus he was given such a long life that it shall be possible for him to be gathered [on the Day of Resurrection] in the company of this [the Muslim] community and be a follower of Muhammad. And yet, he is a man of the era of Abraham the Intimate Friend of God and Dhu'l-Qarnayn [Alexander the Great]. Moreover, he was in the vanguard of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's army when the latter was seeking the fountain of life. Dhu'l-Qarnayn failed to find the fountain of life, but Khadir found it.<sup>30</sup>

*Sahl al-Tustari* (203-283 / 818-896)

Sahl is famous in part as the first articulator of the doctrine of the *Nur Muhammad* (the light of Muhammad), a conception of the Prophet Muhammad's essential being as a primordial light. In explaining the source of this concept, 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani (1098-1131) ascribed al-Tustari's discovery of the idea to a visit from Khidr, during which Khidr revealed it to al-Tustari.<sup>31</sup> Here again, an unprecedented articulation of a

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<sup>29</sup> al-Hujwiri, *ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), p. 125.

<sup>31</sup> Hamadani, 'Ayn al-Qudat Abu'l-Ma 'ali 'Abd Allah b. Muhammad, *Tamhidat* (ed. A. Osseiran), Tehran 1962, p. 267, cited in Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in*

spiritual reality is attributed to Khidr as a way of validating the concept as both legitimate and as extraordinary.

*Mansur ibn Husayn al-Hallaj (244-309 / 857-922)*

The narrative of Khidr has served for some as a way of illuminating the martyrdom of al-Hallaj, the celebrated mystic and martyr of Baghdad. It would follow naturally that al-Hallaj, who so successfully identified himself with the direct experience of divine reality through his *shathiyat* (ecstatic utterance) “*Ana al-Haqq*” would be also be somehow identified with the Qur’anic figure whose knowledge and compassion are said to be directly God-given. In this instance another dimension of the story also applies: the question of theodicy. The comparison suggests that God will use the tragedy befalling al-Hallaj, as He used the ‘tragedies’ witnessed by Moses when he journeyed with Khidr.

In the Baghdad *suq* al-Hallaj proclaims, “Yes, go and inform my friends-- that I am on the open sea, and that my boat is dashed to pieces (*inkasarat 'l-safina* ).”<sup>32</sup> Massignon represents this as a reference to the episode in the narrative of Khidr and Moses in which Khidr breaks the boards of a boat. Al-Hallaj’s apostle in Khurasan interpreted the episodes of the story of Khidr as allegories of the tragedy of al-Hallaj’s

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*Classical Islam: the Qur’anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896)* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), p. 150.

<sup>32</sup> Louis Massignon, *Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*. 4 vols. Translated, Herbert Mason. (Princeton, 1922, 1982); I. 596 (cf. Qur’an 18.71 “...*as-safina kharqaha*...”).

execution and epiphany: the breaking of a boat belonging to poor people; the child killed in order to preserve the faith of the parents; the repairing of the wall revealing a treasure in a city which refuses hospitality. Al-Hallaj, in this sense was the boat, the child, and the treasure.<sup>33</sup>

*Abu'l-Fath Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (469-548 / 1076-1153)*

A noteworthy, if unique, instance of the application of the figure of Khidr involves the attempt by the Persian historian al-Shahrastani in his work, part of which depicts Hermetic and Indian religions, *Kitab al-Milal wa-l-Nihal* (The Book of Religions and Systems of Thought) to formulate an Islamic explanation for the Buddha, whom he compares with Khidr. The trans-temporal and transhistorical aspects of Khidr's persona provide for al-Shahrastani a conveniently flexible and applicable category as he writes:

There is no one comparable to the Buddha as they have described him-- if they are right in that-- except al-Khidr, whom Muslims recognize.<sup>34</sup>

Commenting on this comparison, Bruce Lawrence writes:

Shahrastani compares the Buddha with al-Khidr. The comparison is suggestive. Both the Buddha and al-Khidr are closely linked with the quest for enlightenment. Al-Khidr, or Khidr is widely revered in both Qur'anic and mystical traditions. It appears,

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<sup>33</sup> Massignon, *ibid.*, I. 639-640.

<sup>34</sup> Abu'l-Fath Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal wa-l-Nihal* Part II, Book III, Section B: '*Ara' al-Hind* (Translated, Bruce B. Lawrence as *The Views of the Indians*), Chapter 1A, "The Followers of the Buddhas," in Bruce B. Lawrence *Sharastani on the Indian Religions*. (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), p. 43.

therefore, that Shahrastani is implicitly attesting to the high spiritual quality of Buddhism in putting the Buddha on a par with al-Khidr.<sup>35</sup>

Since Shahrastani begins by commenting that Buddhas are said to be unborn and undying, his selection of Khidr as an Islamic correlate to the Buddha, suggests that Shahrastani assumes Khidr is immortal. A second quality of the Buddhas which al-Shahrastani finds in Khidr is their combination of multiple appearances coupled with underlying consistency in their teaching. Khidr's immortality and multiple appearances throughout history suit him well in the service of al-Shahrastani's analogy between the Buddhas and Khidr. In a less obvious way, the selection of Khidr underscores the functions of Khidr emphasized in the Qur'an, those of teacher and guide.

*'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (470-561/1077-1166)*

'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, celebrated with such accolades as *al-Ghawth al-A'zam* (the Greatest Succor) and *Qutb az-Zaman* (the Axial Saint of the Age), famous in his time as a *muhaddith*, *mufti*, *mufassir*, and *faqih*, has been popularly credited with the institution of the *tariqa* as a formal institution of confraternity and the establishment of the *zawiyya* as a center for the life and practice of the spiritual community. Historical sources depict him as having conducted himself as an *'alim*, whose facility

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<sup>35</sup> Lawrence, *ibid.*, pp. 113-114. As Lawrence observes, we have no evidence of an earlier association between Buddha and Khidr, however, elsewhere (p. 101) he cites Ibn al-Nadim's identification of the Buddha with Hermes.

was a *madrasa* with a *ribat* in which he lived.<sup>36</sup> He inherited the school of his teacher and initiator into Sufism, the Hanbali *faqih* and *Qadi* Abu Sa'd al-Mubarak al-Mukharrimi, attracted significant financial support by virtue of his skill in preaching and pedagogy, and expanded the school into the institution which spawned the Qadiriyya, the first *tariqa* to emerge from the previous model of teacher-centered circles, or *ta'ifa*. The first investiture 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani received was a *khirqa* from the hands of Abu Sa'd 'Ali al-Mukharrimi, was alleged to have been transmitted "by order of Khidr."<sup>37</sup> 'Abd al-Qadir wrote that while deliberating whether to join Abu Sa'd school, he was visited by Khidr:

"Please come to my school at Bab al-'Azj," [Abu Sa'd] asked. I did not answer, but inwardly I said, 'I will not leave this place without divine order.'" Now long after al-Khidr came to me and told me, "Go and join Abu Sa'd."<sup>38</sup>

As a younger man, 'Abd al-Qadir had also been similarly guided by Khidr. When at the age of eighteen he approached Baghdad, he was stopped by Khidr who conveyed Allah's order that he postpone his entry for another seven years. Khidr brought him to a ruin in the desert where he confronted and resisted the temptations of the ego and the devil. For three years thereafter Khidr visited him to renew the order to stay. At the

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<sup>36</sup> J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 40-42.

<sup>37</sup> Trimingham, *ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Tosun Bayrak, "Introduction," to 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, *Sirr al-Asrar*, translated by *idem.* as *The Secret of Secrets*. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992), p. xxxii.

end of the seven years he heard a voice one night saying, "...you are now permitted to enter Baghdad."<sup>39</sup>

Here again, hagiographical accounts, both secondary and autobiographical, have marked critical turning points in the career of a leading, and in this case, paradigmatic shaykh, with the presence of Khidr.

*Abu Bakr Muhammad Muhyi-d-Din Ibn 'Arabi ( 560-638 / 1165-1240)*

In lists of initiatic succession (*silsila*), the Andalusian-born *shaykh al-akbar*, Ibn 'Arabi is shown having received initiation directly from Khidr and also from others who had received initiation from Khidr.<sup>40</sup> For one whose wandering (*siyaha*) was, as Claude Addas suggests, a means of acquiring knowledge and encounters with the saints, an attraction to the wandering Khidr seems appropriate.<sup>41</sup> In both his life and teachings, Ibn 'Arabi illuminates important dimensions of the nature of Khidr and the encounter with Khidr. In his seminal work on prophecy (*nubuwwa*), the *Fusus al-Hikam (Bezels of Wisdom)*, Ibn 'Arabi makes a number of important observations about the companionship between Khidr and Moses which shed light directly on the

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted and paraphrased in Tosun Bayrak, *ibid.*, p. xvi.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, pp. 316, 319. Ibn 'Arabi is shown having received direct initiation from Khidr in the *silsila* of the *khirqa akbariyya* according to Shaikh Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Sanusi (d. 1276/1859) based on the *salsabil al-mu'in fil tara'iq al-arba'in* (Addas, 318-319) Ibn 'Arabi was initiated by Abu 'Abd Allah b. Jami' who had received initiation from Khidr, according to the *silsila* of the *khirqa akbariyya* according to Ibn 'Arabi, based on the *Kitab nasab al-khirqa* and *Futuhat* (Addas, 316).

<sup>41</sup> Addas, *ibid.*, p. 125.

issues to which our present inquiry is directed.<sup>42</sup> Ibn ‘Arabi identifies five analogies between the actions of Khidr and important events in the life of Moses. Our interest in these observations hinges on the sense in which Ibn ‘Arabi’s observations imply that in his teaching and guiding of Moses, Khidr mirrored Moses’s own being, biography, and patterns of action.

Ibn ‘Arabi draws the following five analogies between the teaching acts performed by Khidr and events in the life of Moses:

1. The apparent danger to the boat’s owners and passengers created by Khidr’s staving their vessel mirrors the danger posed to Moses as a baby when he floated at risk on the river in an ark (Qur’an 20.39; 28.4; 40.25).

2. When Moses’ mother placed the baby Moses in an ark, the apparently dangerous act was intended to rescue him from a violent Pharaoh, who is mirrored in the story of Khidr by the king seizing boats by force.

3. Khidr’s slaying of the boy evokes Moses’ slaying of the Egyptian (Qur’an 20.40; 26.14,19; 28.15-16).

4. Khidr’s apparent violence echoes the violence of Pharaoh.

5. Khidr’s apparently unconditionally gratuitous and unsolicited rebuilding of the wall parallels Moses’ unsolicited act of helping the daughters of Shu’ayb at the well at Midian, without intending to seek a reward (Qur’an 20.23; 28.22-28).

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<sup>42</sup> Muhyi-d-din Ibn ‘Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam* (translated by Angela Culme-Seymour from the French translation of Titus Burckhardt as *The Wisdom of the Prophets*.) (Gloucestershire: Beshara Publications, 1975), pp. 103-18, s.v. “The Word of Moses.” Also see R.W.J. Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 256-260.

In Ibn ‘Arabi’s consideration of the relationship between Khidr and Moses, we find a sensitivity to the process of mirroring and an attention to etiquette (*adab*), including the *adab* of Khidr toward Moses.

Al-Khidr knew that Moses was a messenger of God; so he paid attention to whatever emanated from him, so as not to lack respect toward the messenger of God. when Moses questioned him for the third time, al-Khidr said to him: “This is our separation,” and Moses did not answer him: ‘No,’ and he did not ask him to stay, for he knew the extent of his own dignity of messenger, which had made him forbid him to accompany him further; he was silent then, and they separated. Consider the perfection of these two men in their knowledge and in their tact with regard to the Divine Reality, in the same way as the impartiality of al-Khidr - Peace be on him! – when he said to Moses: ‘I possess a science which God has taught me and which thou dost not know; and thou dost possess a science which God has taught thee and which I do not know.’ This word, like balm on the wound that he had inflicted upon him in saying, ‘...and how wilt thou have patience with regard to (the things) that thy science does not englobe;’ saying that, he knew that Moses had received the dignity of messenger of God, whereas he himself had not that function.<sup>43</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabi articulated the nature and significance of Khidr, as well as recounting his own meetings with Khidr. Ibn ‘Arabi specifically associated Khidr with Ilyas (Elijah), ‘Isa (Jesus) and Idris (Enoch/Hermes Trismegistus) as a group constituting the four *awtad* (literally, “tent-pegs,” or pillars). These four are each *afrad*, solitary ones, considered to be immortal prophets.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibn ‘Arabi, *Fusu al-Hikam*, (Burckhardt/Culme-Seymour translation, p. 108). The comments in the elipsis state that Moses in offering Khidr his “excuse” to leave him if he should once again protest was his way of insuring Khidr’s departure. See *Sahih al-Bukhari* vol 4, ch. 23, sec. 613, p. 405. In the comments which follow Ibn ‘Arabi draws parallels between the discrete domains of the distinctive sciences belonging to Moses and Khidr and the incident, reported in *hadith*, wherein Muhammad explained to date farmers that in their work, they were more knowledgeable than he. As quoted herein by Ibn ‘Arabi, Muhammad says, “You are wiser than I in the things of your world.” This point, as related back to the relationship between Khidr and Moses, may shed light on the role of the Murshid in offering guidance on certain kinds of worldly affairs.

<sup>44</sup> Ibn ‘Arabi *Futuh al-Makkiya* II, p. 19 in Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993). cf. Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 94; 152, n. 52.



In his own life, three encounters between Khidr and Ibn ‘Arabi are reported as well as two references to investitures with the mantle of the initiation from Khidr (*khirqā Khidriyya*), one in Seville in 592 and one in Mosul in 601.<sup>45</sup> In events leading up to his first meeting with Khidr, Ibn ‘Arabi had on one occasion disagreed with his Sevillian Shaykh, Shaykh al-’Uryani, concerning the spiritual state of the Mahdi.<sup>46</sup> Later Ibn ‘Arabi was met by Khidr, who told him that al-’Uryani was correct, not Ibn ‘Arabi. Ibn ‘Arabi then conceded to Khidr his status as a newcomer to the Way.”<sup>47</sup>

Two encounters in Tunis in 1194 follow. In his second meeting with Khidr, Khidr walks toward him on the water and talks to him “in his [Khidr’s] own language”:

I was in a boat in the port of Tunis. I had a pain in my stomach, but the people were sleeping so I went to the side of the boat and I looked out over the sea. Suddenly I saw by the light of the moon, which was full that night, someone coming toward me on the surface of the water. Finally he came up to me and stood with me. First he stood on one leg and raised the other so I could see that his leg was not wet. Then he did the same with the other leg. After talking to me for a while in his own language, he saluted me and went off, making for a lighthouse on top of a hill over two miles distant from us. This distance he covered in two or three steps. I could hear him praising God on the lighthouse. He had often visited our Shaykh al-Kinani, an elder of the order who lived at Marsa ‘Idun, from whose house I had come that evening. When I returned to the town a man met me who had asked me how my night with Khidr on the boat had been, what he had said to me and what I had said to him.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Addas, *ibid.*, p. 62, 299, 304.

<sup>46</sup> Addas, *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> Austin, R.W.J. *The Sufis of Andalusia*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 25. Cf. Peter Lamborn Wilson, “The Green Man: the Trickster Figure in Sufism,” *Gnosis Magazine* No. 19, (Spring 1991): 22-26; *idem. Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam*. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1993), pp. 57, 117, 119, 138-146, 152-3.

<sup>48</sup> Austin, R.W.J. *The Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 27; Addas, *ibid.*, 298-299.

We opened the first chapter of this work with this passage. There we asked what the phrase “his own language” means. In light of al-Qashani’s statement that Khidr’s language was the “language of spiritual states,” we can understand Ibn ‘Arabi’s description of Khidr’s own language as more than just a colorful or mystifying detail. The term “his own language” symbolizes the distinction between spiritual guidance (*suhba*) and instruction (*ta’lim*) and the need to pursue each in its appropriate way. Each has its own language. Spiritual guidance works with patient action and silence; instruction with concepts and questioning.

It is noteworthy that Ibn ‘Arabi mentions that Khidr also would visit “our Shaykh al-Kinani.” As we shall discuss below, it is rarely, if ever, that Khidr’s appearance abrogates or supersedes the relationship with one’s living mortal master. In this case as in others, Khidr confirms the authority of the living and mortal master. We will take up this point below when we compare appearances by Khidr with those of Uways al-Qarani.

The narrative detail that Ibn ‘Arabi was addressed by Khidr in Khidr’s own language serves to express both the idea of Khidr’s knowledge as intelligent discourse and the inexpressibility of its distinctive dimension. As a language it is intelligible; as Khidr’s special language it is reserved as the privilege of the spiritual elite (*khass*). This is a point to which al-Qushayri also refers in his tafsir.

The third encounter with Khidr follows also in Andalusia between Tarifa and

Rota:

Some time later I set off on a journey along the coast in the company of a man who denied the miraculous power of the saints. I stopped off in a ruined mosque to perform the midday prayer together with my companion. At the same moment a group of those who wander remote from the world entered the mosque with the same intention of performing the prayer. Among them was the man I had spoken to at sea and whom I had been told was Khidr; there was also another man of high rank who was hierarchically superior to Khidr (*akbar minhu manizilatan*). I had already met him previously, and we had become bound by ties of friendship. I got up and went to greet him; he greeted me in turn and expressed his joy at seeing me, then he moved forward to direct the prayer [as imam]. After we had finished the prayer the imam started to leave; I followed him as he moved towards the door of the mosque, which faced to the west and looked out over the ocean in the direction of a place called Bakka. I had just started talking to him at the door to the mosque when the man whom I said was Khidr took a small prayer rug which was stored in the *mihrab* [prayer niche], stretched it out in the air seven cubits above the ground and got onto it to perform the supererogatory prayers. I said to my travelling companion: 'Do you see that man and what he is doing?' He asked me to go over and question him, so I left my companion to go over and see Khidr. When he had finished his prayers I greeted him and recited some verses to him. He said to me: 'I only did this for the sake of that unbeliever!' and he pointed to my companion, who denied the miracles of the saints and, sitting in a corner of the mosque, was watching us.<sup>49</sup>

One implication of this encounter is that it demonstrates Khidr practicing the pillar of the ritual prayer (*salat*) in both its required (*fard*) and supererogatory (*nawafil*) forms. Ibn 'Arabi's narrative picks up some of the motifs in the story of Khidr and Moses: he takes a companion on a journey and parts from him; similarly Khidr's excuse for performing the miracle of doing the prayer above the ground ("I only did this for the sake of that unbeliever!") evokes Khidr's explanation to Moses in the Qur'an: "I did not act of my own accord." (18. 82)

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<sup>49</sup> Ibn 'Arabi, *Futuhat* I, p. 186, in Addas, *ibid.*, 125-126. Addas offers the following identifications of the four pillars (*awtad*) which may apply here: "Idris is the Pole, Jesus and Elijah are the two Imams, and Khadir the fourth pillar." (p. 65)

Concerning one of his investitures with the initiatic mantle of Khidr, Ibn 'Arabi

reported:

When I got to the house [the house of 'Ali ibn 'Abdullah ibn Jami'], he had me sit down in a particular spot in the room. When I asked him the reason for this he replied, that Khidr had sat there and that he had put me there because of the spiritual power still adhering to it. Then he went on to tell me what had happened during Khidr's visit. He said, 'Although I had not mentioned the *khirqah* [the mantle of initiation], he brought out a small cotton cap and placed it with his own hands on my head. I then took it off, kissed it and placed it between him and me. Then he said to me, 'O 'Ali, would you like me to invest you with the *khirqah* ? I replied, 'O Master, who am I to say?' Then he took it in his hands in another way and put it on my head.' Then I said to 'Ali, 'Do with me as he did with you.' Then he took his small cloth cap and performed exactly the same ceremony with me. I myself have always performed this investiture in accordance with the tradition passed down through the chain of spiritual masters (*silsilah* ), and it is the way in which I invest others with the *khirqah*.<sup>50</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi's fourth investiture with the *khirqah* was the transmission of the *khirqah* of Khidr given to him by a disciple of Qadib al-Ban (Al-Hasan Qadib al-Ban al-Mawsili [d. 570/1174]).<sup>51</sup> Addas observes concerning the *khirqah* that "...in the Islamic West the term *khirqah* appears to have been used as a symbolic way of describing *suhba*-- keeping the regular company of a teacher-- rather than as referring to an actual form of ritual affiliation. [T]his investiture [with the *khirqah*] is simply a symbol of initiatory companionship"<sup>52</sup> The identification of the investiture as "initiatic

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<sup>50</sup> Austin, R.W.J. *The Sufis of Andalusia*, p. 157.

<sup>51</sup> Addas, *ibid.*, p. 145; William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn 'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: S.U.N.Y., 1998), p. 395, n. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Addas, *ibid.*, p. 143, 145; William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn 'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: S.U.N.Y., 1998), p. 395, n. 20.

companionship” (*suhba*) amplifies a motif in the Quranic narrative of Khidr and Moses: their relationship is one of *suhba*, i.e., “companionship.”<sup>53</sup>

Because Corbin and Addas have dwelt on the similarities between Ibn ‘Arabi’s encounters with Khidr and the tradition of Sufis whose spiritual guides are deceased and not physically present, we turn to consider this comparison and its relevance, plausibility, and fidelity.

*Comparisons between Khidrian Encounters and the Encounters of the Uwaysi Sufi Tradition*

The type of initiation which is described as the investiture by Khidr, has been seen as an ahistorical initiation, in which succession occurs without physical encounter. Superficially it might seem that there is a parallel because encounters with Khidr and Uwaysi initiation appear to involve contact with non-corporeal beings. In the *maghrib*, for example a Khidrian initiation designated what had been called Uwaysi in the *mashriq*. Later the term Uwaysi initiation came to substitute for the concept of Khidrian initiation.<sup>54</sup> However, a typological analysis raises interesting questions about such correlations between Uways al-Qarani (d. 36/657) and Khidr and the

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<sup>53</sup> Qur’an 18.76. Moses tells Khidr, “If I ask you anything after this, don’t keep companionship (*fa-la tusahibini*) with me” In his *tafsir*, Ruzbihan describes the relationship as *suhba*.

<sup>54</sup> Personal communication from Vincent J. Cornell, January 2000.

differences in the types of initiations with which these two figures have been associated.

The following analysis shows that the relationship between the type of initiation between the Prophet Muhammad and Uways al-Qarani on the one hand, and Khidr and various saints on the other, is analogous, but also distinctive in important ways. Henri Corbin and Claude Addas have linked Ibn ‘Arabi’s encounters with Khidr with the Uwaysi tradition. They have suggested parallels in the following four sets of transhistorical relationships:

- (1) al-Bistami (d. 261 A.H. / 874 C.E.) and Ja’far as-Sadiq (d. 148 A.H. / 875 C.E.);
- (2) al-Kharaqani (d. 425 A.H./ 1033 C.E.) and al-Bistami (d. 261 A.H. / 874 C.E.);
- (3) ‘Attar (d. 627 A.H. / 1229 C.E.) and al-Hallaj (d. 309 A.H. / 922 C.E.);
- (4) Baha ud-Din Naqshband (d. 791 A.H./ 1388 C.E.) and ‘Abd al-Khaliq Ghujuwani (d. 575/ 1179 C.E.), and also, Hakim al-Tirmidhi and Uways<sup>55</sup>

The ascriptive paradigm of such non-physical encounters is the figure of Uways al-Qarani (d. 36/657), a Yemeni camel-herder and contemporary of the Prophet

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<sup>55</sup> Arthur F. Buehler, *Charisma and Exemplar: Naqshbandi Spiritual Authority in the Punjab, 1857-1947* (Unpub. Dss. Harvard, 1993). Baha’uddin experienced the spiritual presence (*tawajjuh*) of Hakim al-Tirmidhi without attributes, i.e., form. By contrast, he “experienced travelling with the spirit of Uways with attributes, i.e., he saw Uways’s form.” Buehler, *ibid.*, p. 85-86, n. 113.

Muhammad who is described in a *hadith* transmitted by al-Tirmidhi (835-898).<sup>56</sup> Recognized by the Prophet, he has earned the title *Khayr al-Tabi'in*, the “Eminent among the Successors.”<sup>57</sup> A section of *Sahih Muslim*, “The Merits of Uways [al-Qarani,” carries statements about Uways transmitted by Usayr ibn Jabir and ‘Umar ibn Khattab:

‘Umar ibn Khattab reported: I heard Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Worthy amongst the successors would be a person who would be called Uways. He would have his mother (living with him) and he would have (a small) sign of leprosy. Ask him to beg pardon for you (from Allah).<sup>58</sup>

Of Uways, the Prophet attests in another *hadith* : “I feel the breath of the Compassionate coming from the direction of the Yemen.”<sup>59</sup> Al-Hujwiri reports that Muhammad said to his companions, “There is a man at Qaran called Uways, who at the Resurrection will intercede for a multitude of my people.”<sup>60</sup> Although later traditions represent a mutuality of acquaintance between the Prophet and Uways, these reports clearly show the Prophet as having known of Uways, but do not indicate that Uways in turn knew the Prophet.

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<sup>56</sup> A shrine designated as the tomb of Uways is located in Zabid, Yemen.

<sup>57</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, tr. ‘Abdul Hamid Siddiqi (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Asraf, 1971-5) Vol. IV, p. 1349, n. 2382.

<sup>58</sup> *Sahih Muslim* Chapter 1047. Vol. IV, p. 1349

<sup>59</sup> Henri Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 32; cf ‘Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, R. A. Nicholson, ed., I, p. 121

<sup>60</sup> al-Hujwiri, *ibid.*, p. 83

The account in *Sahih Muslim* recounts that ‘Umar sought out Uways and asked him to pray on his behalf for forgiveness from Allah.<sup>61</sup> It is ‘Attar (d. 627/1229), who in recounting the visit by ‘Umar, includes ‘Ali’s participation in this trip, and, especially, the significant and famous motif of their presentation to Uways al-Qarani of the mantle of the Prophet as a gift.<sup>62</sup> Here also Uways returns ‘Umar’s inquiry concerning the reason Uways had never visited the Prophet by showing that, in friendship for the Prophet who had broken a tooth during the Battle of Uhud (3 A.H./625 C.E.), Uways had no teeth at all.<sup>63</sup> Al-Hujwiri recounts that Uways was prevented from physically seeing the Prophet “firstly by the ecstasy which overmastered him and secondly by his duty to his mother.”<sup>64</sup>

Of the consequent emergent tradition of Uwaysi Sufis, ‘Attar, the first to write of this tradition, asserts:

Know that there is a group of people who are called Uwaysi. They stand in no need of a *Pir* (spiritual guide) for they are looked after in the bosom of Prophethood (*Nubuwwat*)— i.e., they obtain spiritual knowledge directly from the Prophet— without any intermediary, in the same way as Uways had done. Although he had not seen the Master of the Prophets, he was taught by him, and the Prophethood looked after him, and in fact it was his companion. This is the most exalted status one could hope to acquire.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. IV. P. 1350.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, Tehran, A.H.S. 1136, p. 27, quoted in A.S. Hussaini, “Uways al-Qarani and the Uwaysi Sufis,” *Muslim World* 57/2 (April 1967) p. 109.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, p. 29 in A.S. Hussaini, *ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>64</sup> al-Hujwiri, *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, pp. 33-4 in A.S. Hussaini, *ibid.*, p. 112



Jami underscores this category of the Uwaysi Sufi, with the point, especially relevant to our consideration of the relevance of this to Khidrian phenomena, that the abrogated relationship is to that of a “living *Pir*.:”

In the same way the ‘Friends of God,’ who walked in the footsteps of the Prophet, have guided disciples through the power of their spirit, so that their disciples stand in no need of a living *Pir*. These persons are also included among the Uwaysis.<sup>66</sup>

Addas comments that the viability of an ahistorical initiation is based on “the transmission of *baraka*. between the *ruhaniyya*-- the ‘spiritual presence’ of a shaikh who has been dead. and a *murid*.”<sup>67</sup> In this light Abu’l-Hasan Kharraqani (d 425/1034), considered an ‘Uwaysi wrote: “I am amazed at those disciples who declare that they require this or that master. You are perfectly aware that I have never been taught by any man. God was my guide, though I have the greatest respect for all masters.”<sup>68</sup> Al-Kharraqani considered himself initiated by Abu Yazid al-Bistami in a dream after having visited his tomb.<sup>69</sup>

Are encounters with Khidr rightly or fruitfully to be identified as Uwaysi encounters? ‘Attar says Uwaysis stand in no need of a *Pir*. Jami says they stand in no need of a living *Pir*. ‘Attar, in the quote above, specifies that the direct contact is with the Prophet Muhammad, who is generally conceded (at least outside of the paradigm

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<sup>66</sup> Jami, *Nafahat al-Uns* p. 20; cf. P. 501, quoted in A.S. Hussaini, *ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>67</sup> Addas, *ibid.*, p. 142, n. 40.

<sup>68</sup> Henri Corbin, *ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>69</sup> J.T.P. de Bruijn, s.v. “Kharraqani,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

of the *Nur Muhammad* ) to be a mortal being who died;<sup>70</sup> whereas Khidr is generally considered immortal. Literally speaking , Khidr is living and in almost all accounts described as being physically present, alive, and incarnate-- not a *ruhaniyya* or spiritual presence or energy.

It is crucial to distinguish the living, incarnate Khidr and the phantom-like energy of Uways. Corbin's identification between Khidrian encounters and the Uwaysi transmission only works if the accounts of Khidr are assumed to be allegorical, and if Khidr's corporeality, not to mention his very existence, are both dismissed. One basis for distinguishing between the Khidrian encounter and the Uwaysi tradition is that few appearances of Khidr occur in dreams. At least in terms of narrative presentation, Khidr appears as a physically incarnate being. Also, in distinction to Uwaysi encounters, allegiances to Khidr do not supersede other lines of transmission and submission to a Pir, as described above by Jami and al-Kharaqani. For example, in a hagiographical story about Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi which we will discuss below, Mevlana's *murids* touch Khidr's garment (implying physicality) and Khidr tells them to continue to follow their shaykh. This one story shows both differences between Khidr and Uwaysi-shaykhs: Khidr is alive, physically manifest; and not dead Khidr does not typically replace the role of a living shaykh.

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<sup>70</sup> The *locus classicus* in the Qur'an attesting to Muhammad's mortality is Sura Al Imran (3.144).

There still remains the question of whether Uwaysi encounters comprise specifically those encounters with Muhammad, as Attar described, or with the *ruhanniya* of deceased Shaykhs as Jami described, or both. In any case no representations have included Khidr in this category. In this light it helps to recall ash-Shadhili's objection to the *fuqaha'* that in addition to considering al-Hallaj a heretic, they claim that Khidr is dead.<sup>71</sup> Similarly the Kubrawi Shaykh 'Ala' al-Dawla al-Simnani (b. 659/1261) insisted on saying "the Lord" Khidr in acknowledgment of his sensitivity to Khidr's living presence.<sup>72</sup> To the degree that Khidr is a living physical presence, we cannot say that his appearances should be classified as Uwaysi encounters.

Encounters with Khidr can only even begin to be categorized as Uwaysi encounters if Khidr is a deceased mortal, a view which is rare or absent in Sufi circles.<sup>73</sup> In addition to the question of Khidr's status as alive or deceased, further considerations require sorting out: Assuming Uwaysi encounters are not limited to encounters with Muhammad, does Khidr belong to the same category as Uwaysi shaykhs who have historically traceable biographical settings? Further, what is the

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<sup>71</sup> quoted in Massignon, *Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol. II, p. 216.

<sup>72</sup> F. Meier, s.v. "Ala al-Dawla al-Simnani," in *Encyclopedia of Islam* I, p. 347.

<sup>73</sup> A more appropriate designation for the status of Khidr's existence may be the term *ghayba* which "is used for the condition of anyone who has been withdrawn by God from the eyes of men and whose life during that period (called his *ghayba*) may have been miraculously prolonged. It is also used of Khidr." (D.B. Macdonald and M.G.S. Hodgson, s.v. "Ghayba," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960).

comparative significance of the fact that Khidrian encounters do not pre-empt relationships with other shaykhs? At the least, Uwaysi relationships are typically dominant, if not exclusive, whereas Khidrian encounters, while frequently pivotal, are rarely exclusive or dominant. In short, categorizations of meetings with Khidr as being of an Uwaysi type raise more questions than they answer, distort the distinct natures of both Khidrian and Uwaysi encounters, and preclude authentic understanding of each type of encounter.

*Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi (605-672 / 1207-1273)*

It is hardly surprising to find Mevlana invoking Khidr. Mevlana's love of his teacher Shams-i Tabrizi, his resonance with suffering and pain, his quest for inner knowledge, all embody themes heralded in the narrative of Khidr and Moses. The *Mathnawi* and hagiographies of Mevlana feature passages where Khidr assumes pivotal importance.

First, Mevlana compares his own relationship with his teacher Shams-i Tabrizi to the relationship between Moses and Khidr. This emerges from an event described in Aflaki's hagiography *Munaqib al-'Arifin*:

Even though Hazrat Mawlana did not find Shams al-Din in the outward form (*surat*) in Damascus, in reality (*ma'na*) and even something greater, inside his own self. [O]ne day Hazrat-i Mawlana wrote at the door of the room of Mawlana Shams al-Din with red ink in his own hand, "This is the station of the beloved of Khidr, peace be upon him."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Aflaki, *Manaqab al-'Arifin*. Vol. 2, pp. 699-700. Unpublished translation by Omid Safi with small modifications. As Safi points out, the final phrase: "*maqAm- e ma 'shUq- e Khidr 'alayhi*

Mevlana's son Sultan Veled also describes Mevlana's relationship to Shams, as analogous to the relationship between Moses and Khidr:<sup>75</sup>

Hazrat Sultan Veled also stated: "Just as Moses, with all the might of Prophethood and the exaltedness of the valour of Messengerhood was seeking Khidr— peace be upon him, so did Hazrat Mawlana, with all the excellences, praiseworthy manners and behavior, with all the talents and spiritual stations and miraculous acts of generosity, illuminations, and secrets which in his own time and age was unmatched, was seeking Mawlana Shams-i Tabrizi."<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, Sultan Veled starts his *Ibtida-Nameh* with the story of Moses and Khidr and declares: "His [Rumi's] Khidr was Shams-i Tabrizi."<sup>77</sup>

Concerning the Qur'anic narrative, Mevlana observes that even though Moses had achieved prophethood, he nonetheless required a guide. As we have pointed out before, in the narratives of Moses in the Qur'an, Moses encounters two figures as his equal or greater: He is compared with the forthcoming Messenger Muhammad, and

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*salam*," ("This is the station of the beloved of Khidr.") may also be translated as, "This is the much beloved station of Khidr." I am grateful to Professor Safi for sharing this work.

<sup>75</sup> *Walad-namah*, 41, ed. J. Huma'i (Tehran: Iqbal, 1316/1937) cited in William C. Chittick, "Rumi and the Mawlawiyyah," in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*. (New York: Crossroads, 1991), pp. 106.

<sup>76</sup> Ahmad Aflaki, *Manaqib al- 'Arifin*, Vol. 2: 687-688. Translation by Omid Safi. I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Safi for sharing portions of his unpublished translation with me.

<sup>77</sup> *Veled-nameh* [the title under which Sultan Veled's *Ibtida-nameh* was published in Iran], edited by Jalal ad-Din Homa'i. (Tehran: Ketabkhaneh-ye Iqbal, 1956), 56. Unpublished translation by Omid Safi.

through direct encounter and discipleship (*ittiba'*) in the narrative of Moses and Khidr, is implicitly compared to Khidr.<sup>78</sup>

One of the prominent instances of Mevlana's use of the meaning of Khidr appears in the *Mathnawi's* opening frame narrative,<sup>79</sup> "the story of the king and the love-sick maiden and the holy doctor."<sup>80</sup> The description of the relationship between the king and the doctor, the means of the doctor's healing, and the explanation of the doctor's remedy are each implicitly, and in the case of Mevlana's explanation of the remedy, explicitly, related to the Qur'anic example of the relationship between Khidr and Moses and the meaning of the events in that story.<sup>81</sup>

Since Mevlana explains the doctor's treatment of the maiden as a mystery comparable to the actions of Khidr, a brief summary of this opening story of the

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<sup>78</sup> Rumi, *Mathnawi* III: 1959-63 in Renard, John, *All the King's Falcons* (Albany: S.U.N.Y., 1994), p. 84. Moses and Muhammad are implicitly compared in Sura al-'Araf 7.155-159 where the answer to the prayer by Moses and the seventy elders concerning forgiveness for their people is predicated on the forthcoming appearance of Muhammad. Moses assumes the lesser positions of student, in the case of Khidr, and forerunner, with respect to Muhammad. While both Khidr and Muhammad receive *'ilm* and *rahma* (and in Muhammad's case *tanzi*), in neither case is there any hint of written transmission.

<sup>79</sup> This narrative begins at the 36<sup>th</sup> verse following introductory verses which include the 18-line piece popularly identified as the "Song of the Reed Flute."

<sup>80</sup> Coleman Barks, trans., *The Essential Rumi* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), p. 230.

<sup>81</sup> In *Mathnawi* I: 222-238 Mevlana interprets the healing actions of the doctor as analogous to the acts of Khidr, whose name is mentioned in verses 224, 236 (two instances), and 237. The actions directly alluded to are the Khidr's slaying of the boy (verse 224) and the staving of the boat (v. 236). One significance of Mevlana's citation of Khidr at this point may be understood by the fact that Khidr is one of the first Quranic figures to appear in the *Mathnawi*. Exactly four prophets are cited prior to the series of references to Khidr: Moses (v. 26), Muhammad (v. 77), Jesus (v. 81) and Joseph (v. 125). In one sense the application of the acts of Khidr are obviously a method of interpreting the story of the King, maiden, doctor, and goldsmith; conversely, the story provides interpretation and commentary upon the role of Khidr, as that of a spiritual "doctor."

*Mathnawi* can illustrate some of Mevlana's understanding of Khidr. This parable of the cleansing of the mirror of the soul<sup>82</sup> introduces a king whose power extends over both temporal and spiritual realms and narrates the events of a hunt, during which the king discovers and buys a beautiful maiden with whom he has fallen in love. Taking her back to his kingdom, he now faces the problem that the maiden becomes incurably ill. The wounded king declares, "She is my remedy."<sup>83</sup> Troubled that none of his doctors can heal her, he runs ("barefooted") to the mosque and intensely prays the *salat al-istikhara* (prayer of the seeking [of guidance]). In the ensuing prescribed incubational sleep, an old man appears in his dream to herald the arrival on the next day of a stranger who is a "physician you can trust."<sup>84</sup> As the king sees the doctor approach, a strong wave of mutual attraction between their souls draws them toward each other and he rushes out to him, greeting him with the declaration: "You are my beloved, not the girl."<sup>85</sup> At this point the king compares the doctor to Muhammad, and himself to 'Umar.<sup>86</sup> The king goes on to articulate his appreciation for the doctor with themes

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<sup>82</sup> In verses 34 and 35 Rumi introduces the tale with this description.

<sup>83</sup> *Mathnawi* I: 44.

<sup>84</sup> *Mathnawi* I; 64, in Barks' translation, *ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>85</sup> *Mathnawi* I: 76. The king goes on to compare his relationship to the doctor as like that of 'Umar to Muhammad (v. 76). Mevlana compares the role of the doctor to both those of Muhammad and Khidr. As we have observed Moses narratives in the Qur'an also occasion exceptional identifications of the roles of Muhammad and Khidr. Here in Mevlana's story, they are compared in a way consistent with the above-quoted historical observation by Vincent Cornell that Muhammad's role of as the paradigm of the Shaykh was subsequent to the earlier more typical identification of Khidr in this role.

which are shared with, and repeated in, the Qur'anic Khidr narrative. Specifically the king's statements echo the themes of *sabr* (patience), the extent of Khidr's knowledge as beyond Moses's comprehension, and the interpretive mode of *ta'wil* :

. "At last," said he, "I have found a treasure by being patient."

...

O thou whose countenance is the answer to every question,  
by thee hard knots are loosed without discussion.

Thou interpretest all that is in our hearts. "<sup>87</sup>

Explaining to the king that the healing of the maiden will be effected through his knowledge of "inner states," the doctor leads the maiden to disclose the source of the illness, her love for a goldsmith in Samarkand. The doctor describes his healing to the maiden as "what rain does to a meadow,"<sup>88</sup> an implicitly Khidrian metaphor, reminiscent of the *hadith* which explains Khidr's name as reflecting his virtue of turning barren land verdant. The doctor instructs the king to lure the goldsmith from Samarkand. He recommends the maiden and the goldsmith be wed, allows them six months of wedded bliss, and then administers to the goldsmith a potion which causes him to atrophy. The maiden then ceases loving the goldsmith, who finally dies.

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<sup>86</sup> *Mathnawi*, I.76. This comparison may be viewed in relation to Mevlana's commentary on Sura al-Muzzamil (73) in his *Maktubat* IV. 1453-85 in which he relates that God has entitled Muhammad both a Noah and a Khidr.

<sup>87</sup> *Mathnawi* I: 95, 96, 97, Nicholson trans. See also Barks, trans, *ibid.*, p. 228. The reference to a treasure may evoke the phrase *kanzuhuma rahma* (their treasure, a mercy) of Qur'an 18. 82, especially in light of the seven-times repeated use of the word *sabr* (patience) throughout the 23 *ayat* of the Quranic narrative. In addition to the explicit reference to *sabr* in this verse involving the treasure, the implicit sense of the "coming to strength" (*yablughah ashuddahuma*) implies the process of awaiting one's reward.

<sup>88</sup> *Mathnawi* I: 172



Mevlana counsels that from this we should learn instead to “Choose the love of that Living One who is everlasting, from whose love all the prophets gained power and glory.”<sup>89</sup>

Mevlana proceeds to correlate the actions of the doctor to those of Khidr. This resolution and explanation of the narrative underscores the implicit analogies to Khidr and demonstrates Mevlana’s vision of the role of the spiritual guide as represented in the figure of Khidr:

But what about  
the doctor’s poisoning the poor goldsmith! It was not done  
for the king’s sake. The reason is a mystery  
like Khidr’s cutting the boy’s throat.  
Everything  
the doctor did was out of God’s will. Khidr  
sunk the boat, yet it was right to do.  
When someone  
is killed by a doctor like this one, it’s a blessing,  
even though it may not seem so.<sup>90</sup>

Mevlana specifically analogizes the doctor’s therapy to two of Khidr’s actions narrated in the Qur’an: the slaying of the boy and the sinking of the boat. In his last statement Mevlana draws a close analogy between the doctor and Khidr. Overall, this story which opens the *Mathnawi* describes the work of the spiritual guide along the analogy of a doctor as informed by the “mystery” of the Qur’anic model of Khidr. Finally Mevlana cautions that we cannot judge these actions (of the doctor and Khidr)

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<sup>89</sup> Mathnawi I: 219-220.

<sup>90</sup> Barks, *Essential Rumi*. Compare with Nicholson translation, *Mathnawi I*: 222-236. Renard suggests that Mevlana’s detail of describing the boy’s death as by cutting his throat may be meant to echo the nearby reference (in Book I.227) to Isma’il. (Renard, *ibid.*, p. 85).

because we do not live, as do the doctor or Khidr, fully in truth.<sup>91</sup> This theme echoes that of the Qur'anic narrative in Khidr's disclosing of the *ta'wil* of the events Moses could not bear with patience, an event which highlights the problems of passing judgment without a complete comprehension of the truth.<sup>92</sup>

Mevlana emphasizes that as Moses submitted to Khidr, every dervish must surrender to his Shaykh, who is his 'Khidr'.<sup>93</sup> Mevlana points out that Abu Yazid al-Bastami, on his way to the Ka'aba searched for the "Khizr of his time:"<sup>94</sup>

Bayazid on his journey (to the Ka'ba) sought much to find some one that was  
the Khizr of his time.  
He espied an old man with stature (bent) like the new moon; he saw in him majesty  
and (lofty) speech of (holy) men;  
His eyes sightless and his heart (illuminated) as the sun; like an elephant dreaming of  
Hindustan<sup>95</sup>

The dervish whom Abu Yazid finds and considers to be the "Khizr of his time" explains his status as a living Ka'aba and the "Ka 'aba of sincerity:"

He said, "Make a circuit around me seven times, and reckon this (to be) better than the circumambulation (of the Ka'ba) in the pilgrimage.

Albeit the Ka'ba is the House of His religious service, my form too, in which I was created, is the House of His innermost consciousness.

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<sup>91</sup> *Mathnawi* I: 246.

<sup>92</sup> Qur'an Surat al-Kahf (18. 68).

<sup>93</sup> *Mathnawi*, I:2969-71; II:3527-30; VI: 187, in Renard, *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>94</sup> *Mathnawi*, II:2231.

<sup>95</sup> *Mathnawi* II: 2231-33.

Never since God made the Ka'ba hath He gone into it, and none but the Living (God) hath ever gone into this House (of mine).

When thou hast seen me thou hast seen God: thou hast circled round the Ka'ba of Sincerity.

To serve me is to obey and glorify God: beware thou think not that God is separate from me.

Open thine eyes well and look on me, that thou masyest behold the light of God in man.”<sup>96</sup>

This dervish, the “Khizr of his time,” explains that he and God are not separate and that in him one may behold the “Light of God in man.” These descriptions correspond to the “essential union” of Ruzbihan Baqli’s usage alluded to above. Mevlana’s rhetoric here boldly underscores the potential of the figure of Khidr to serve as theophanic identity, presence, and symbol. Khidr here symbolizes the presence of God and the access to that presence-- the human embodiment of the means otherwise conceived as available through the pillars of worship (*‘ibadat*) and its related symbolic forms.

In explaining the *adab* of the relationship to the *shaykh*, Mevlana applies the principles of the “mean (between extremes)” and the analogy of the balancing of the four humours to establish health. Moses’s behavior which drives him apart from Khidr is faulted for its excess:

Do not exceed in (any) quality him that is thy yoke-fellow, for that will assuredly bring about separation (between you) in the end.  
The speech of Moses was in good measure, but even so it exceeded the words of his good friend.  
That excess resulted in his opposing Khidr; and he (Khidr) said, ‘Go, thou art one

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<sup>96</sup> *Mathnawi*, II: 2240, 2245-49.

In an ironic twist, typical of Mevlana, and emblematic of the character of Khidr, Mevlana follows this passage by overturning it. In a dervish's answer to the questions of his *shaykh*, the dervish explains the relativeness of the middle path: it is found only in relation to contingencies, circumstance, and individual temperament. He further asserts, that since the infinite lacks the reference points of beginning and end, how can one find a mean which exists in relation to the infinite? Mevlana invokes Khidr's example to justify and praise the interpretation:

To the Shaykh's questions he gave answer good and right, like the answers of Khidr,  
 (Namely) those answers to the questions of Moses which Khidr, (inspired) by the all-knowing  
 Lord, set forth to him,  
 (So that) his difficulties became solved, and he (Khidr) gave to him (Moses) the key to every  
 question (in a way) beyond telling.  
 The dervish also had (a spiritual) inheritance from Khidr (hence) he bent his will to answering  
 the Shaykh.  
 He said, 'Although the middle path is (the way of ) wisdom, yet the middle path too  
 is relative.'<sup>98</sup>

Mevlana's teacher Shams-i Tabrizi retells the story of Khidr and Moses with his own commentary and offers guidance on cherishing this story. In Shams' telling, as Moses approaches his third question, Khidr claps his hand, gets up to dance and says, "Hurry up, say it, free me again, finish it." Shams finds in this story many of the critical aspects of Sufism:

Moses awakes, sees things, becomes a beloved, the candle is burnt and the Saki is asleep. Blessed is the one who finds such a 'servant [from our servants]' and who holds the story of Moses and Khidr in his heart, and makes it his Imam."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Mathnawi*, II: 3514-16.

<sup>98</sup> *Mathnawi*, II: 3527-31.

Here Shams envisions spirituality as fulfilled in the I-and-Thou relationship between seeker and guide which Moses and Khidr model. Shams also later compares Khidr to Muhammad in terms of truthfulness in teaching: “Only Muhammad and Khidr spoke truthfully [to their companions].”<sup>100</sup>

In the work and life of Mevlana, Khidr is portrayed as the model of the shaykh and the relationship between Moses and Khidr describes the relationship which a *murid* should seek and cultivate. In addition to this analogy between the Shaykh and Khidr, Mevlana also asserts that *every* disciple must seek the guidance of Khidr himself.<sup>101</sup> In a number of places, Mevlana attests to the significance of Khidr and his teaching in terms of the training of the dervish and the knowledge of God. In addition, Mevlana applies the motif of the Water of Eternal Life, implied in the Qur’anic motif of *majma’ al-bahrain* (the meeting of the two seas) and underscored by the popularly-known story transmitted in various versions of the *Iskandarnama*.<sup>102</sup> Finally, Mevlana affirms Khidr as a theophanic presence, the human equivalent of the House of God (*bait Allah*).

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<sup>99</sup> Shams- i Tabrizi, *Maqalat*. Edited by Muhammad ‘Ali Muwahhid. (Tehran: Intisharat-i Khawarazmi, 1990), p. 212-213. Unpublished translation by Omid Safi.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 2.177.

<sup>101</sup> *Divan-i Shams* 836:6; 1215:19; 1422:7; 3074:6 in Renard, *ibid.*, pp. 85, 183 n. 57.

<sup>102</sup> Nizami, *Iskandarnama* in Minoos Southgate, *Iskandarnama: A Persian Medieval Alexander-Romance*. Translated, Minoos Southgate (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

Mevlana gives unreserved praise for Khidr's station as he designates (through the voice of Moses) that Khidr is the *Sahib az-Zaman* (the Master of the Age). In this quote, Moses answers those who object to his departure:

Do not make this reproach, do not waylay the Sun (Khidr) and the Moon (Moses)  
I [Moses] will fare as far as the "meeting place of the two seas," that I may be accompanied  
by [*Sahib uz-Zaman* ] the sovereign of the time (Khidr).  
I will make Khidr a means (*sabab* ) to (the achievement of) my purpose: (either) that,  
or "I will go onward" [Qur'an 18.60] and journey by night a long while.<sup>103</sup>

Mevlana translates the symbol of the breaking of the boat into an analogy for purifying love:

Have you heard how Khidr broke the planks of the ship to save it  
from the hands of the tyrant? (Qur'an 18. 72,80)  
The Khidr of your time is Love: Broken, the Sufi is pure and sits at the bottom like dregs.<sup>104</sup>

In this verse Mevlana equates a state of *kashf* (unveiling) as the reality of eternal love which the story of Khidr describes:

When the veils have been burned away,  
the heart will understand completely the stories  
of Khidr and knowledge from God.  
Ancient Love will display the ever-renewed forms  
in the midst of the spirit and the heart.<sup>105</sup>

Khidr's association with sainthood (*wilayat*) is apparant as Mevlana describes Khidr's water as the speech of the saints (*awliya*):

Oh you who are thirsty and heedless come!  
We are drinking the water of Khidr from the stream:

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<sup>103</sup> Mathnawi III: 1967-69; VI: 1126ff. In Renard, *ibid.*.

<sup>104</sup> Mevlana Jalal ad-Din Rumi, *Divan*, 4315-16 in William C. Chittick, *Sufi Path of Love* (Albany: S.U.N.Y., 1983),190.

<sup>105</sup> Mevlana Rumi, *Divan*, 21240-41 in Chittick, *ibid.*, p. 262.

the speech of the saints.<sup>107</sup>

This extent and degree of recognition of the paradigmatic status of Khidr which Mevlana imparted to his disciples serves in the interpretation of the following hagiographical narrative of Khidr and Mevlana:

When Jalal was quite young, he was one day preaching on the subject of Moses and Khidr. One of his disciples noticed a stranger seated in a corner, paying great attention and every now and then saying: "Good! Quite true! Quite correct! He might have been the third one with us two!" The disciple surmised that he might be Khidr. He therefore seized hold of the stranger's skirt, and asked for his spiritual aid. "Oh," said the stranger, "rather seek assistance from Jalal as we all do. Every occult saint of God is the loving and admiring friend of him." So saying, he managed to disengage his skirt from the disciple's hold, and instantly disappeared. The disciple went to pay his respects to Jalal, who at once addressed him, saying: "Khidr and Moses, and the prophets, are all friends of mine." The disciple understood the allusion, and became more devoted at heart to Jalal than he even was before."<sup>108</sup>

This anecdote advances the authority of both Mevlana and Khidr. Mevlana's level of attainment is symbolized by the appearance and expressions of approval of Khidr who attests that Mevlana would have been worthy to participate in the meeting between Moses and Khidr. Khidr here emphasizes the importance of unmitigated submission to one's own shaykh. This dialogue shows that Khidr symbolizes the ideal that continued submission to one's own shaykh is more valuable than a singular encounter with even Khidr himself.

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<sup>107</sup> Mevlana Rumi, *Mathnawi* 4302 in Chittick, *ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>108</sup> Shams ud-Din Ahmad al-Aflaki, *Manaqib al-'Arafin*, translated, James W. Redhouse as *The Legends of the Sufis*. (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1881, rpt. 1977). I have revised Redhouse's version in the following ways: although Redhouse makes it clear through his citation of the Qur'anic verses of the story of Khidr and Moses that the stranger in the corner is Khidr, he chose (perhaps for the ease of his nineteenth-century readers) to substitute the name Elias, based on traditions which associate Khidr and Elijah. I have also omitted Redhouse's explanatory parenthetical remarks which in the context of this work are redundant.

It is worth noting the motif of the seized skirt in this episode in relation to the question of the corporeality of Khidr's manifestations, which is one of the issues underlying the comparison between Khidrian and Uwaysi encounters, as we discussed above. This detail would seem to conform to and corroborate the typical understanding that Khidr's manifestations are physical.

*Nizam ad-Din Awliya (1242-1325)*

Among the collected discourses (*malfuz/malfuzat*) of the Chishti Pir Nizam ad-Din Awliya, entitled *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad*<sup>109</sup> appear a number of references to Khidr. Two which may be distinguished significantly from what we have reviewed in the foregoing are instructions in two types of prayers of Khidr. In the first case, a *murid* receives instruction in what Nizam ad-Din identifies as the "prayer of Khizr" which calls for performing ten *raka'at* in which the second *qira'a* consists of Sura al-Ikhlās, and in which the *raka'at* are punctuated by five *tahiyat*.<sup>110</sup> Nizam ad-Din explains that "it is known as the prayer of Khizr. [b]ecause whoever performs this prayer continually is assured of meeting Khidr."<sup>111</sup> In a second instance, Nizam ad-Din emphasizes the necessity (particularly in regard to compensating for missed prayers) of invocatory

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<sup>109</sup> Nizam ad-Din Awliya, *Fawa'id al-Fu'ad*. Translated and edited by Bruce B. Lawrence as *Morals of the Heart* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.



prayers, the “epitome” of which is he says is the *musabba’at al-’ashr* (the ten [prayers] repeated seven-fold). The *musabba’at al-’ashr* was gained as a favor given to Ibrahim Tamimi by Khidr, in the vicinity of the Ka’ba.<sup>112</sup> Khidr imparted the prayer with these words of blessing: “I transmit it to you on the authority of God’s messenger— blessings and peace be upon him!”<sup>113</sup> Nizam ad-Din gives as an example of the prayer’s protective capacity the story of a traveler attacked by robbers who is saved by ten horsemen.<sup>114</sup>

Nizam ad-Din presents two other narratives involving Khidr. In one, concerning “renouncing worldliness,” a “saint among saints” prayed atop the water “O God, Khidr has committed a heinous sin. Make him repent of it.” Khidr appears to hear the saint’s accusation that the sin lies in having made a tree sprout up in the desert and then resting in its shade,<sup>115</sup> while claiming to have acted for God. The saint

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>112</sup> cf. Abu Talib Muhammad al-Makki (d. 996), *Qut al-Qulub fi mu’amat al-mahbub wa wasf tariq al-murid ila maqam al-tawhid* (Cairo: 1884-5), first section, p. 7.

<sup>113</sup> Nizam ad-Din Awliya, *ibid.*, p. 333. Lawrence gives instructions for performing the prayer on p. 383, n. 93. These instructions specify the performance as following *fajr* and *’asr* prayers (and, as Nizam ad-Din counsels, at other times, for the resolution of important matters [cf. p. 226]), commencing with three *durud*, and proceeding to recitations of the following suras: (1) Fatiha, (2) Nas, (3) Falaq, (4) Ikhlas, (5) Kafirun, and (6) Ayat al-Kursi (The Throne Verse). The *basmala* precedes each recitation. Translations of the remaining three portions, a *tasbih*, a *tasliya*, and two *du’a* follow *op. cit.*

<sup>114</sup> Nizam ad-Din Awliya, *ibid.*, p. 332. (An interesting detail illustrating narrative analogy presents the horsemen as bald, which turns out to correspond to the traveler’s omission of the *basmala* before the recited suras).

<sup>115</sup> This motif echoes the *hadith* of the origins of Khidr’s name as related to his fertile greening influence upon the desert. *Sahih Bukhari*, 4.55.23.614

proceeded to challenge Khidr to be and act as he does, unattached to the world to such an extent that he would reject the world even if that rejection itself caused him to end in the punishments of hell.<sup>116</sup> We are not explicitly told that the saint's accusation against Khidr is valid. But this tale is nonetheless distinctive for its presentation of a saint who so explicitly challenges Khidr's actions and motives. This narrative may possibly be meant to teach the superiority of a *mortal* living Pir over ones of ambiguous supernatural or immortal status such as Khidr and Uways.<sup>117</sup> As a contrary example, it is nonetheless significant, since it underscores a sincere creative tension in the articulation of the role of Khidr as model of the Pir, in that the model is of such power that it elicits suspicion of danger and evokes responses of challenge. The tension in this tale potentially relates to the distinction, parallel to the narrative in the Qur'an, of Khidr's apparently questionable behavior on the surface (*zahir*) and his essentially excellent intentions and actions at a fundamental or inner (*batin*) dimension.

The second story of Khidr refers in passing to the two prayers of Khidr and continues the themes of Khidr's status and the question of seeking good in the world. Also in this story, Khidr is presented in more than one light. During one of the nights of Ramadan, Shaykh Qutb ad-Din Bakhtiyar performed both the two *raka'at* prayer

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<sup>116</sup> Nizam ad-Din Awliya, *ibid.*, pp. 175-6.

<sup>117</sup> Some thematic similarities appear between this story and an apocryphal narrative about a meeting between Baha ud-Din Naqshband which is recounted in Arthur F. Buehler, *Charisma and Exemplar*, p. 90, which Buehler presents as a narrative intended to privilege the living (mortal) Pir over Uways, and in a sense Khidr. However in the Baha ud-Din Naqshband narrative, his Pir, Amir Kulal,

of Khidr and the *musabba'at al-'ashr*, seeking to meet Khidr. After waiting, he began to leave in disappointment, when a man conversed with him and asked what a man like him would want of Khidr, especially since Khidr is a “mere vagabond.” In light of the shaykh’s intention to see Khidr, the man specifically asked whether the shaykh was seeking worldly gain or needed to repay a debt. At that moment a luminous stranger (Khidr) appeared and the man fell at his feet. Rising and respectfully retreating he tells Khidr, “This dervish. does not seek to repay a debt nor to make a worldly gain. He simply wants to meet you.” Immediately the *adhan* is called and “dervishes and Sufis” appear from all directions. Assembling, they proclaim the *takbir* and perform *tarawih* prayers. The following day between dawn and daybreak the shaykh returns to the mosque but no one appears.<sup>118</sup>

In the foregoing tale we are treated to bivalent visions of Khidr. Khidr on the one hand is a “vagabond,” to be sought only by those seeking relief from debt or worldly gain. Furthermore, the shaykh, who sincerely seeks Khidr purely for the purpose of meeting him receives a vision, and engages in no direct encounter with the immortal sage. On the other hand, Khidr is luminous, commands the respect (enacted in prostration) of the man in the mosque, and appears if he were a ray of light immediately before the assembling of the congregation of dervishes and Sufis for

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who followed Ghujduvani, praises Khidr in these terms: “The *nisbat* of the Khwajagan is from four people, the first of which is Khidr.” (*op. cit.* P. 90).

<sup>118</sup> Nizam ad-Din Awliya, *ibid.*, pp. 222-223.

*tarawih* prayers-- as if Khidr dematerialized into the stream of worshippers. Such a story-telling technique would seem to be built on the distinction, parallel to the events in the Qur'anic narrative, between the outer (*zahir*) aspect of Khidr's uniqueness as an aggravating type of peculiarity, and the inner (*batin*) dimension which requires a subtlety of vision to see the true nature of Khidr's being.

A remaining narrative shows Nizam ad-Din encouraging a servant who had four marriageable daughters that a daughter is a "barrier against hell" and that fathers of daughters are blessed. Nizam ad-Din then refers to the incident in the story of Khidr and Moses in which Khidr kills the boy and explains, "[B]lessed Khizr, due to the perfection of his spiritual state, gave him a satisfactory explanation." Nizam ad-Din paraphrases the *hadith* that the son was replaced by a daughter whose seven sons were each a "paragon of saintliness." In this story, unlike in preceding tales, Nizam ad-Din here shows no ambivalence in praising to Khidr, above all for the "perfection of his spiritual state."<sup>119</sup>

*Sharafuddin Maneri (1263-1381)*

In his letters, Sharafuddin Maneri identifies five degrees of spiritual guidance, and the "five supports" upon which rest the "qualifications and claims to rank of a shaykh,"

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., pp. 287-288.

extracted from the narrative of Khidr and Moses, particularly from 18.65.<sup>120</sup> The first is the submission of servanthood and freedom from all that is not God. Second is the capacity for direct and unmediated instruction, which requires going beyond the “natural man with all his disordered inclinations.” Third is a specially graced degree of submission. Fourth is the honor of receiving divine knowledge from God without any intermediary, in which the heart is wiped clean of knowledge obtained by the intellect, or by hearing, or by sense perception. The fifth stage is the conferring of “infused knowledge” which includes that of the “divine essence.”<sup>121</sup> Here Maneri bases his criteria for identifying a true and specifically appropriate shaykh from the example of the narrative of Khidr and Moses.

Maneri explains the distinctive “hidden knowledge” of the saint as “ ‘infused knowledge,’ a title derived from the story of Moses and Khidr.” Again Maneri finds an ‘Occam’s razor’ explanation for the co-existence of prophetic and saintly knowledge in the story of Moses and Khidr.

Maneri further underscores the role of this narrative as a model for submission to the authority of the spiritual guide: “Let him consider the story of Moses and Khidr, so that he can understand what abandonment of self-control entails; for if a

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<sup>120</sup> Sharafuddin Maneri, *The Hundred Letters*, Translated, Paul Jackson, (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), Letter 6, p. 30.

<sup>121</sup> Maneri, *ibid.*, Letter 6, p. 30-31.

novice rejects the authority of the guide, he becomes an apostate of the Way. None of the guides of the Way will be able to help such a person reach his destination.”<sup>122</sup>

*Ahmad ibn Idris* (d. 1253/1837) and ‘*Abd al-’Aziz ibn Mas’ud ad-Dabbagh* (d. 1131/1719)

Ibn Idris is perhaps the best known shaykh within a lineage traced back to the Maghribian order named for Khidr, the Khidriyya. Ibn Idris’ first initiation into Sufism was by Abu’l-Mawahib ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Tazi and was an initiation into the *tariqa* of the Khidriyya. The Khidriyya was a *silsila* begun in 1125/1713 by ‘Abd al-’Aziz ibn Mas’ud ad-Dabbagh (d. 1131/1719). Ibn Idris describes the importance of Khidr to his lineage and the exceptional status of this “shaykh of shaykhs [and] universal sage”:

We took the Way from the succor of the time and imams of his age, the exalted shaykh, our lord and master, ‘Abd al-Wahhab al-Tazi, then al-Fasi, where he was born and grew up. He took it from the succor of his time and imam of his age, the Hasani Sharif, our lord and master, sayyid ‘Abd al-’Aziz, known as al-Dabbagh (and ) al-Fasi, where he was born and grew up. He took it from the shaykh of shaykhs, the universal sage (*al-fard al-jami’*), sayyid Abu ‘l ‘Abbas Ahmad Khidr.<sup>123</sup>

Ad-Dabbagh’s disciple, Ahmad ibn Mubarak as-Sijlmasi (d. 1156/1743) describes the meeting underneath a tree during which Khidr initiated ad-Dabbagh into a special litany (*wird*) and recollection (*dhikr*):

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., Letter 37, p. 143.

<sup>123</sup> Ibn Idris from an undated letter to Muhammad ‘Uthman al-Mirghani in *Majmu ‘jawabat*, ms. Khartoum, Miscellaneous 1/18/1294, p. 104, quoted in R.S. O’Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press), p. 44.

I [ad-Dabbagh] remained in this perplexity from the age of 21. In the course of those years I passed each Friday watch in the tomb of Saint Sidi 'Ali b. Hirzām and recited the entire *Burda* (the poem of the mantle) with his companions. One night after we had recited the *Burda* as we did customarily, I came out. And in front of the gate of the cemetery, I saw a man sitting under a tree (*as-sidra al-muharrara*). He addressed me and revealed (*yakashifuni*) things of my inner heart. I understood that he was a saint possessing the knowledge of God Almighty (*'arif bi-llahi*). I said to him, "O my master, give me the litany (*wird*) and teach me the recollection (*dhikr*)." But he avoided the conversation. I insisted, but he refused because his purpose was to test the extent of my endurance so that I would not forget what he told me. We stayed thus until dawn and the light appeared on the minaret. He told me, "I will give you the *wird* if you give me the oath that you will not forget it." I took the oath with him. I believed that he would give me a *wird* such as those of the shaykhs with whom I had associated, but he said to me, "Repeat each day 7,000 times: 'O my God for the honor of our master Muhammad b. 'Abdallah, blessing and greeting (*sallut*) of God be upon him, unite us, me and our master Muhammad b. 'Abdallah in this world before the world beyond.'" Then we arose. Sidi 'Umar b. Muhammad al-Huwari, the administrator of the tomb joined us and the man [Khidr] said to him, "Take care of him." "He [ad-Dabbagh] is my master, O my master," Sidi 'Umar responded. Much later, he [Sidi 'Umar] returned and asked me, "Do you know who taught you the *dhikr* by the tree?" As I did not know he answered it is our master Khidr, peace be upon him." It was not until that moment of revelation that I understood the remark of Sidi 'Umar.<sup>124</sup>

Atlagh suggests that the relationship between ad-Dabbagh and Khidr was ongoing:

"This period of apprenticeship began in 1121 with the meeting with al-Khidr."<sup>125</sup> Sidi 'Umar, the eyewitness in the episode quoted above, announced on his deathbed that ad-Dabbagh had been initiated by Khidr.<sup>126</sup>

After the death of his shaykh Abu'l-Qasim al-Wazir, Ibn Idris met with the Prophet and Khidr and received instruction in the Shadhili *dhikr*:

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<sup>124</sup> Ahmad ibn Mubarak as-Sigilmasi (d. 1156/1743), *Al-Ibriz min Kalam 'Abd al-'Aziz*, quoted in Ridha Atlagh, "Topologie d'une Hagiographie *al-Ibriz min Kalam 'Abd al-'Aziz*: Etude thematique des propos et des idees du Sayh 'Abd al-'Aziz ad-Dabbagh (m. 1131/1719) (Unpublished paper).

<sup>125</sup> Atlagh, p. 16.

<sup>126</sup> Atlagh, p. 18.

... I met after his death [i.e., of Abu'l-Qasim al-Wazir], may the mercy of God be upon him, with the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, together with Khidr, upon whom be peace, in order that he should teach me the *dhikrs* of the above-mentioned Shadhiliyya order, and I learnt them in his presence.<sup>127</sup>

The text continues with the details that the Prophet recited the *dhikr* to Khidr who taught them to Ibn Idris, who in turn repeated them back before both the Prophet and Khidr.<sup>128</sup> Ibn Idris' student Muhammad ibn 'Ali as-Sanusi (1202-76/1787-1859) explains that through the involvement of Khidr Ibn Idris emerges as a 'fourth generation' inheritor of the lineage. In this sense as-Sanusi proposes that both ad-Dabbagh and Ibn Idris are akin to the successors (*tabi'un*) to the Prophet owing to their transmissions from Khidr:

This is among the most exalted of the short *sanads* because Khidr, on whom be peace, met the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, during his lifetime in the same way that all the Companions took from the Prophet. Likewise sayyid 'Abd al-'Aziz (ad-Dabbagh) took from the Prophet in the same way as all the successors (*al-tab'iyyun*, successors to the Companions) took on the authority of the Companions who were the contemporaries of the Prophet, may God bless and grant him peace and so on. Thus the intermediaries between us and the Prophet, may God bless and grant him peace are four.<sup>129</sup>

These examples show the role of Khidr in the emergence of the Idrisiyya and in some of its rhetoric of legitimation. Ibn Idris and Ibn ad-Dabbagh, both teachers in a lineage

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<sup>127</sup> Ibn Idris, *Kunuz al-jawahir*, quoted in R.S. O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisiyya Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), p. 48.

<sup>128</sup> R.S. O'Fahey, *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisiyya Tradition* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990), p. 48.

<sup>129</sup> Muhammad ibn 'Ali as-Sanusi, *al-Manhal al-rawiy* in *al-Majmu'a al-mukhtara*, 49 and 61, quoted in O'Fahey (1990), p. 108.



known as the Khidriyya asserted the quality and directness of their spiritual inheritance by attesting to encounters with Khidr.

*Baba Rexheb: Dialogue and Metalogue*

In a recent socio-linguistic study of the teaching relationship between an Albanian Bektashi *Murshid* and his American disciple, socio-linguist Frances Trix,<sup>130</sup> the story of Khidr and Moses works on two levels: at one level, the book profiles a specific teaching encounter between Baba Rexhab and Frances Trix in which the content of his teaching is the narrative of Moses and Khidr; on a second level, the application and context of the teaching event itself is framed by the story of Khidr as a meta-discourse guiding their dialogue.

Trix describes the workings of two socio-linguistic processes in her 75-minute *sohbet* (spiritual conversation) with her Shaykh Baba Rexhab. Trix identifies the processes of “attunement,” (a concept applied from John Dewey) in which socio-linguistic boundaries are harmonized, and the process of “appropriation,” (a concept adapted from Paul Ricoeur) in which cultural distance and historical alienation are bridged, to achieve what Gadamer calls a “fusion of horizons.” Trix describes how these processes at work in the dialogue with her shaykh are informed by the narrative of Khidr and Moses.

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<sup>130</sup> Frances Trix, *Spiritual Discourse*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

Concerning the content of the story, Trix examines the way her Baba applies the contents of the narrative of Khidr and Moses to illuminate the method and *adab* of the immediate teaching situation and the specific relationship of spiritual guidance which Trix and Baba share, and to discuss issues of spiritual guidance and submission to the shaykh.

An important contribution of this study is also the presentation of a significant alternative episode. Trix reports that Baba Rexhab customarily and intentionally omits the second episode of the slaying of the youth and substitutes for it an alternative story which deeply underscores dimensions of the *murshid-murid* relationship.<sup>131</sup> In this episode, Khidr instructs Moses to walk across a river, on the very surface of the water, repeating the words “Ya Pir Haqq” (“My true guide.”) Khidr leads Moses across, with Moses repeating this phrase and Khidr calling out the divine name Allah. At some point in this crossing, Moses discerns that it is incorrect for him to call upon his Pir in lieu of calling upon Allah, and so switches to conform to the practice of calling on the name of Allah, as Khidr has been doing. At that very moment, Moses begins to sink under the surface of the water. By identifying the *adab* of the *murshid-murid* relationship in the lives of Khidr and Moses, this narration attempts to legitimate the practice of focusing on the shaykh as the point of orientation to God. Validation for the *murshid-murid* relationship is taken from Moses’s relationship of companionship with Khidr.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp. 100, 122.

*Conclusion: Khidr as Living Qibla and Model of Spiritual Masters*

In gathering these hagiographical episodes about Khidr, we see the ultimate implication of the motif “where two seas meet.” The figure of Khidr provides a point of direct transmission of the knowledge and presence of God. Khidr stands between the temporal world of human experience and the eternal world of divine majesty, grace, and truth with all its force of paradox. Where questions of authority are raised, where chains of transmission falter, where certainty of connection is unclear, Khidr arrives as the symbol, proof, and presence of divine transmission, continuing revelation, and theophanic witness in human form. Khidr stands at the horizon of that potentiality intimated in Adam and Joseph and the succession of Sufi masters: that certain gifted persons function as a human *qibla*, the point of orientation and direction by which one knows and fulfills the summation and essence of the spiritual path. This acceptance of the master as *qibla* is expressed in a story about Muhammad ‘Uthman (d. 1314/1896) seeking to go into the service of the shaykh Dost Muhammad. At first Dost Muhammad refused his request for initiation. In his reply (which turned Dost Muhammad’s heart to initiate him), Muhammad ‘Uthman addressed Dost Muhammad as his “Qibla.”

O Qibla, I have become absolutely ready for this work. [Although] I have tolerated being connected with everything, now I have turned a cold shoulder to it and have irrevocably divorced myself from everything that I have loved.<sup>132</sup>

This sense of Khidr as the *qibla* is implicit in Rumi's story of Bayazid who seeking the "Khidr of his time," found a dervish who declared himself to Bayazid as the "Ka'ba of sincerity," a human Ka'ba around whom Bayazid circled seven times. Since the *qibla* is a point of orientation to the Ka'aba, Rumi's trope of the "Khidr of one's time" as a human Ka'aba includes and surpasses the sense of Khidr as a human *qibla*. In Rumi's *Mathnawi* Bayazid finds that the Khidr of his time is a living Ka'aba:

Bayazid on his journey (to the Ka'ba) sought much to find some one that was  
the Khizr of his time.  
He espied an old man with stature (bent) like the new moon; he saw in him majesty  
and (lofty) speech of (holy) men;  
His eyes sightless and his heart (illumined) as the sun; like an elephant dreaming of  
Hindustan<sup>133</sup>

....

He said, "Make a circuit around me seven times, and reckon this (to be) better than the circumambulation (of the Ka'ba) in the pilgrimage.

Albeit the Ka'ba is the House of His religious service, my form too, in which I was created, is the House of His innermost consciousness.

Never since God made the Ka'ba hath He gone into it, and none but the Living (God) hath ever gone into this House (of mine).

When thou hast seen me thou hast seen God: thou hast circled round the Ka'ba of Sincerity.

To serve me is to obey and glorify God: beware thou think not that God is separate from me.

Open thine eyes well and look on me, that thou mayest behold the light of God in man."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Muhammad Isma'il, *Mawahib rahmaniyya fi fawa'id wa fuyudat hadarat thalatha damaniyya: kamalat-i uthmaniyya* (Lahore: Urdu Art Printers, 1986), 37-38 quoted in Arthur Beuhler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: the Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Shaykh* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 154-155.

<sup>133</sup> Rumi, *Mathnawi* II: 2231-33.

In this sense, Khidr's position at the place "where two seas meet," his role as the conveyor to Moses of inner knowledge and divine mercy, and his being the object of Moses' divinely-commanded quest, make of Khidr a human *qibla*, the focal point of the fulfillment of the spiritual life.

It is this sense of Khidr standing "where two seas meet" – serving as a living *qibla* in that in-between space -- that grants a vivid metaphor to the role of the shaykh as the bearer of spiritual blessing, the summation of the prophetic sunna in action, and the possessor of inner knowledge and grace. The story of Khidr and Moses explains the spiritual master's role and guidance as the point of engagement with God and the Prophetic *sunna*. This story raises the question: without the guidance of the teacher, how can anyone know and live the spiritual path? This was the point that 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani (1098-1131) stressed:

A sound tradition [a hadith of the Prophet] informs us that God's Messenger (God bless him) said, "Whoever dies without an imam dies the death of a pagan." Abu Yazid al-Bistami said, "If a man has no master, his imam is Satan." 'Amr b. Sinan al-Manjibi, one of the great Sufi shaykhs, said, "A man who has not been to school with a master, such a man is an imposter." The Sufi expositors of the true reality are unanimous in declaring that he who has no shaykh is without religion."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., II: 2240, 2245-49.

<sup>135</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani, 'Complaint of a Stranger Exiled from Home,' trans. A.J. Arberry, in Arberry, *A Sufi Martyr: the Apologia of 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhani*. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. 1969, p. 33.

Further, in the story of Moses' journey with Khidr, a hermeneutic of truth is explored and a resolution of the question of theodicy is attempted: without knowing the comprehensive context of the truth of events, how can one be qualified to judge whether, or how, divine compassion is being expressed?

In the eyes of the Sufi *mufassirun*, these qualifications for complete understanding result only from directly-bestowed divine knowledge. The Quranic story of Khidr and Moses presents such knowledge under the terms "directly-disclosed divine knowledge" (*'ilm ladunni*) and "true meaning" (*ta'wil*). It is such knowledge which Sufi commentators have recognized in the story of Moses' journey with Khidr as reflecting their own mystical experience. These commentators have elaborated the sense of this knowledge under the terms "directly-disclosed divine knowledge" (*'ilm ladunni*), "unveiled discovery" (*kashf*), "divine decree" (*hukm*), "divine inspiration" (*ilham*), and "witnessing" (*mushahada*). Further, the Sufi commentators have affirmed the role of the spiritual guide (*murshid*) in training the disciple to receive this knowledge, through the right relationship (*adab*) and mentoring companionship (*suhba*) with the guide or master.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION: MOSES' JOURNEY WITH KHIDR -- INNER KNOWLEDGE AND MANIFEST PRACTICE IN MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Recently a scholarly conference panel described the activity of Sufi exegetes as “taking the Qur’an to heart.”<sup>1</sup> The Sufi hermeneutic of “taking the Qur’an to heart,” requires that one internalize, incorporate, and practice what the Qur’an teaches. If as the conference panel’s title implies, “taking the Qur’an to heart” describes Sufi hermeneutics, then this calls an exegete to be open to being taught. This in turn raises to the question of what the Qur’an teaches about teaching and teachers. As we have seen in this work, one place where the Qur’an addresses the phenomena of teaching and teachers is in the story of Moses’ journey with Khidr. The Sufi commentators interpret that journey as a journey of moral training (*safar al-ta’dib*). The mentoring companionship (*suhba*) of that journey shared by Khidr and Moses serves as the lens through which Sufi commentators recognize and interpret the master-disciple (*murshid-murid*) relationship.

In this work we have examined interpretations of Moses’ journey with Khidr and focused especially on interpretations of Khidr as a teacher, guide, or mentor to Moses. We have followed the development of this thread from the Qur’an and hadith

to the classical tafsir of al-Tabari and three Sufi commentaries of al-Qushayri (d. 1072), Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1209), and al-Qashani (d. 1329). How has mentoring companionship (*suhba*) as a theme been traced and interpreted across these genres?

*Does the Quranic Story Imply a Mentoring Relationship?*

Is it valid to assert that the story of Moses' journey of moral training with Khidr expresses a Quranic perspective on teaching and teachers? On one level the story *seems* to involve a teaching relationship. Semantic clues within the story suggest that it does involve such a relationship. First, God has "taught" inner knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) to Khidr (*'allamanahu min laduna 'ilma* [18.65]). Moses then asks to be "taught" (*tu'allimani*) the guidance (*rushd*) which Khidr allegedly has been "taught" (*'ullimta*). (18.66) In response to Moses' request that Khidr "teach" him, Khidr offers to Moses that Moses may "follow" (*ittaba'tani*) him. These motifs, and the arrangement and agreement between Khidr and Moses which they imply are suggestive. Such contextual clues of Khidr's acts and statements, suggest that Khidr and Moses are engaged in a teaching relationship. In addition to this dialogue on teaching, the keynote term *suhba* (mentoring companionship) is suggested by its use in Moses' second excuse when he says, "If I ask anything...do not keep companionship with me (*tusahibni*)."<sup>1</sup> (18.76) But is this evidence sufficient for drawing and

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<sup>1</sup> "Taking the Qur'an to Heart: Sufi Interpretations of the Qur'an," Panel at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Nashville, Tennessee, November 18, 2000.



establishing the conclusion that the story of Moses' journey with Khidr deals with or can be applied to teaching relationships?

*What Issues Engage the Hadith Collectors and al-Tabari in His Tafsir?*

In the hadith and in the classical tafsir of al-Tabari, *Jami 'a al-bayan 'an ayta 'wil al-Qur'an*, Khidr's status is given as a learned person or sage (*'alim*). But the nature of the *relationship* between Moses and Khidr is not explored. Instead, the hadith and received commentary (*tafsir bi 'l-ma'thur*) are primarily devoted to the narratological and prophetological implications and dimensions of the story. The hadith only suggest a teaching relationship in their discussions of Moses' conduct (*adab*). Even though in the hadith the Prophet Muhammad reflects on Moses' failure to fulfill the terms of his relationship with Khidr, the teaching context is either assumed or ignored. In light of the clearly identified motifs of Moses' request to be taught and Khidr's assent to let Moses follow, the absence of explicit discussion of teaching is striking.

One important point established in the hadith is that Moses' journey with Khidr occurred after Moses had received the Torah. This implies that Moses' knowledge and his decisions are at least potentially informed by the Torah. Consequently this establishes the narrative's protagonists as symbolizing a complementary pair of epistemological and authoritative modes. Ultimately the Sufis

designate this pair as prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and sainthood (*wilaya*). The story of Moses' journey with Khidr explicitly compares prophecy and scripture on the one hand with directly-disclosed inner knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) and the "hermeneutics of origins" (*ta'wil*), on the other. This pair also suggests an encoding of the relationship between orality and literacy in the transmission of knowledge and the development of culture. It is the question of the transmission from Khidr to Moses that is left unexplored in the hadith.

Why would the hadith and received commentaries ignore or downplay this aspect of the story as involving teaching and spiritual guidance? Obviously, Moses' special status as a Prophet sets up a barrier to the use of Moses as a model for an ordinary disciple. In the hadith, Moses' vow to journey for ages provides an exemplary precedent for the scholar's journey (*rihla*) for the collection of hadith accounts.<sup>2</sup> So here Moses emerges as a seeker of knowledge, but this quest is not emphasized within the context of a teaching relationship. Is the scholarly pursuit of hadith reports, even though a devotional enterprise, an activity that shares the intimacy and intensity of the type of master-disciple relationship which the Sufi commentators ascribe to Khidr and Moses?

The hadith collections' provide a catalogue of narrative embellishments, and varied ethical applications. Among this material, a number of points potentially related to mentoring relationships also emerge. We shall review these here. Bukhari takes the

story of Moses' journey with Khidr as a precedent for seeking knowledge with diligence and humility.<sup>3</sup> Moses' journey teaches the importance of persevering in gaining knowledge and remembering that all knowledge belongs to God. But the hadith collections do not suggest the possibility that such journeying might entail the companionship with, and training under a teacher. For this perspective, we will have to wait for the Sufi tafsirs. One motif given in the hadith is that Khidr is covered in a garment (*musaja' bi-thawb*). This motif of the garment (*thawb*) is adopted in Sufi hagiography as the mantle of initiation (*khirqā*). This is especially so in the case of Ibn 'Arabi, who considered the garment of Khidr (*khirqā*) to be mentoring companionship (*suhba*) itself.<sup>4</sup> The hadith reports only begin to sort out the question of how the complementary modes of knowledge of Moses and Khidr co-exist. When Moses approaches Khidr seeking to be taught, Khidr explains:

O Moses, I have some of the knowledge from the knowledge of Allah which Allah has taught me and not you; and you have some of the knowledge of Allah which he has taught you and not me."<sup>5</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad, as recorded in the hadith, reflects on the pattern of Moses' answers and excuses: Moses first gives the excuse of forgetfulness, then promises to Khidr the right to desert him, and finally intentionally asks for and causes his own

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<sup>2</sup> Muhammad ibn Isma'il b. al-Mughirah al-Bukhari (194-256), *Sahih Bukhari*, Volume I, Book 3, Chapter 20, Number 78. Ed. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Medina: Islamic University, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, I. 3. 17. 74; I. 3. 20. 78.

<sup>4</sup> See Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), pp. 143, 145; William Chittick, *The Self Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn 'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: S.U.N.Y., 1998), p. 395, n. 20.

condition of separation from Khidr.<sup>6</sup> But the Prophet Muhammad does not situate his observations on Moses' pattern of answers in the context of a mentoring relationship. It is the Sufi commentators who recognize their own ideals of the relationship of training and guidance as reflected in the story.

In the hadith, the Prophet Muhammad identifies Moses' shortcomings, as reflected in his inappropriate answers, as an issue of *shart*, the legal limits, stipulations, or conditions of responsibility. But the context here is one of oaths, not teaching. As narrated by the Prophet's wife 'Aisha', Moses' request not to be called to account for what he forgot (18.73) is legitimated by the Quranic principle that "Allah will not call you to account for that which is unintentional in your oaths."<sup>7</sup> Al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan apply the Prophet's observations about the pattern of Moses' answers and Moses' fault in issuing stipulations to the right conduct of a mentoring relationship.<sup>8</sup> We shall discuss this below when we review the Sufi tafsirs.

One of the most significant points in the hadith reports concerning Moses' journey with Khidr is the Prophet Muhammad's summary evaluation of Moses' performance: "We would have wished that Moses had been more patient; then Allah

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, IV. 55. 23. 613.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, III. 50. 12. 888.

<sup>7</sup> *Sahih Bukhari* 8. 78. No. 656. This hadith correlates Moses' excuse (18.73) with Qur'an 2.225 quoted here.

<sup>8</sup> Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri, *Lata'if al-isharat*, ed. Ibrahim Basyuni (6 vols.; Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabi, 1968-71). Vol. 2, p. 410-411.

would have narrated more of their story.”<sup>9</sup> As we see from the Prophet’s remarks Moses’ failure to adequately respect and obey Khidr was a problem of patience (*sabr*), a term used seven times in the Quranic narrative. While the Prophet Muhammad did not articulate the context of *suhba* as the mentoring companionship meant by the Sufi exegetes, his observations presage the particular evaluation of the implications of the story presented by the Sufi commentators.

In his tafsir, al-Tabari primarily addresses grammatical, semantic, historical, and narratological concerns which parallel and complement earlier hadith reports. In one citation, al-Tabari paraphrases Khidr’s speech to suggest his teaching relationship with Moses: “Certainly I have taught you and the work that I do is in the realm of the unseen which you cannot encompass.”<sup>10</sup> Al-Tabari identifies Khidr’s knowledge as knowledge of the unseen (*ilm al-ghayb*), and an inner [aspect of] knowledge (*bi-batin al-ilm*). These terms suggest a potential for al-Tabari’s interpretations to offer insights into Khidr’s role as a teacher, without explicitly examining the question of a teaching relationship between Moses and Khidr.

Al-Tabari concludes by presenting the story as a lesson about God’s deferral of punishment of disobedient societies. However this is lesson can only be gleaned by the saints (*awliya*). By claiming this, al-Tabari has at least implicitly established what we might call a “hermeneutics of the saints.” Al-Tabari has thus indirectly described Khidr

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<sup>9</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, I. 3. 124; VI. 60. 249; VI. 60. 251.

<sup>10</sup> Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (224/5-310/839-923), *Jami’ al-bayan ‘an ta’wil ay al-Qur’an* (30 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Alamin, 1992), vol. 15, p. 256, no. 23214.

as a saint and suggested one particular aspect of his knowledge which has political implications. By suggesting that only saints can understand God's deferral of punishment, al-Tabari has suggested a dimension of the saint's hermeneutical capacity which might rival or surpass that of a prophet.

This "hermeneutics of the saints" would implicitly correspond to the "hermeneutics of origins" (*ta'wil*) which is described explicitly within the story of Moses' journey with Khidr. Al-Tabari alludes to a "hermeneutics of the saints" as a mode of understanding the postponement of punishment. Similarly, the "hermeneutics of origins" elucidates the relationship between actions and their consequences.<sup>11</sup> As a hermeneutics which explains the causes, nature, and timing of punishment (consequences) al-Tabari's "hermeneutics of the saints" corresponds to Sufi commentator's definitions of the "hermeneutics of origins" (*ta'wil*).

These interpretations in hadith and tafsir only approach the question of teaching relationships to the extent that they discuss the different levels of knowledge with which Khidr and Moses complement each other, the theme of Khidr as a learned person or sage, and the points of right conduct in their relationship. But hadith and tafsir based on received reports (*tafsir bi 'l-ma'thur*) do not explore and exploit the teaching motifs and context to allow the story to provide a basis for understanding the nature and correct practice of a teaching relationship (*suhba*).

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<sup>11</sup> On the concept of *ta'wil* in Sufi commentaries see, Paul Nwiya, *Exegese Coranique et Langage Mystique*. Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1970), pp. 59-60.

### *How Did Sufi Commentaries Introduce a Teaching Context?*

What are the main insights into the master-disciple relationship which the Sufi exegetes have recognized in the story of Moses' journey with Khidr? And what other topics have they recognized as conveyed in this narrative?

The Sufi tafsirs examine the story of Moses' journey with Khidr to explicitly develop the themes of comportment and the right conduct (*adab*) of a master-disciple relationship (*suhba*). Sufi exegetes engage in a "hermeneutic of recognition" in which the Qur'an, in addition to being a light which illuminates the exegetes' mystical experience, also serves as a mirror which reflects the exegetes' own mystical knowledge and experience. Their insights into interpretation join "the horizons" of the Qur'an's text with "the signs within themselves."<sup>12</sup> This is the exegetical process which Bowering has described as keynotes resonating in a matrix of Quranic discourse.<sup>13</sup> In the sense in which I describe this process as a "hermeneutic of recognition," the term "recognition" invokes Plato's sense of archetypal knowledge as a form of memory.<sup>14</sup> Such innate and primordial exegesis is reflected in the concept of *din al-fitra*,<sup>15</sup> the inherent morality and knowledge narrated in the dialogue between God and humanity

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<sup>12</sup> Qur'an Surat al-Fussilat (41.53).

<sup>13</sup> Gerhard Bowering, "The Qur'an Commentary of al-Sulami," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, ed. Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Meno*, trans. W.K.C. Guthrie (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 115-157; e.g., "...there is no such thing as teaching, only recollection." (82A, p. 130).

<sup>15</sup> The *locus classicus* for this concept is Qur'an Sura Rum (30. 30).

in which God asked the descendents of Adam, “Am I not your Lord,” to which the progeny of Adam answered, “Yes.”<sup>16</sup> The Sufi exegetes’ “hermeneutic of recognition” relies on God-given knowledge and Quranically-inspired experience to provide a professedly objective foundation for interpretation. In this sense the Sufi exegetes consider themselves free of the wiles of interpretation based on personal opinion (*tafsir bi ‘l-ra’y*), which is considered a sin: “Whoever interprets the Qur’an through his personal opinion (*ra’y*), has taken his place in hell fire.”<sup>17</sup> Instead the Sufi exegetes understand themselves as “people of understanding,” or “possessors of the inner heart” (*ulu’ al-albab*) “rooted [in knowledge] (*rasikhun*):”

But no one knows its [the Qur’an’s] true meaning (*ta’wil*) except Allah and those who are firmly rooted in knowledge. They say, “We believe in the Book, the whole of it is from our Lord,” and none grasp the message but men of understanding.<sup>18</sup>

They are engaged in an unveiled discovery (*kashf*) of true meaning (*ta’wil*). The term *ta’wil* appears as a key term in both this key Quranic text on interpretation (3.7) and the story of Moses’ journey with Khidr. One implication of the meaning of *ta’wil* is shown by the exegetical reply in this verse (3.7). The expression of the qualified

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<sup>16</sup> Qur’an Surat al-A’raf (7. [172]). For a discussion of the role of this verse as a basis for Sufi exegesis, see Gerhard Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Quranic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl al-Tustari* (d. 283/896) Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980, 148, 153, 155, 186, 193, 194, 195, 240.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Tirmidhi (d. 279/892) *al-Jami’ al-sahih (Sunan al-Tirmidhi)*, vol. 5 ed. Ibrahim ‘Itwah ‘Awad (Cairo: Mustafa al-Bibi al-Halabi, 1395/1975); *tafsir, bab 1*, vol. 5, p. 199, cited in Alan Godlas, “Psychology and Self-Transformation in the Sufi Qur’an Commentary of Ruzbihan al-Baqli, unpublished paper.

<sup>18</sup> Sura Al Imran 3.7. This is the alternative reading of the verse which is otherwise punctuated with a stop (*waqfa lazim*) equivalent to a period so that it reads: “...those who are firmly rooted [in knowledge] say: ‘We believe in the Book...’”



exegetes' understanding describes the *origin* or *source* of the text as "...from our Lord." Another primary sense in their response includes their declaration that they "believe in the Book." This is also a statement of origins, as it presents belief as the foundation of the hermeneutical relationship with the Book. These perspectives, taken together with the use of the word in the story of Moses' journey with Khidr, contributes to our expression of *ta'wil* as a "hermeneutics or origins." The question then remains: how is *ta'wil* taught?

Following Abu Yazid al-Bistami (d. 874) and 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadani (d. 1131), a long tradition attests to the essential importance of relying on a teacher for guidance and understanding in the fulfillment of faith, submission, and virtue:

...I have spoken of the need of a neophyte for a spiritual instructor to conduct him on the path of truth and to guide him on the straight road, so that he may not stray from the right way. A sound tradition [a hadith of the Prophet] informs us that God's Messenger (God bless him) said, "Whoever dies without an imam dies the death of a pagan." Abu Yazid al-Bistami said, "If a man has no master, his imam is Satan." Amr b. Sinan al-Manjibi, one of the great Sufi shaykhs said, "A man who has not been to school with a master, such a man is an imposter." The Sufi expositors of the true reality are unanimous in declaring that he who has no shaykh is without religion.<sup>19</sup>

In recognition of this fact, the Sufi commentators seize on the details of the story of Moses' journey with Khidr as a clear lesson of the need for and the nature of a master-disciple relationship.

In the Sufi "hermeneutic of recognition" Sufi commentators "recognize" the relationship of Khidr and Moses as a relationship between the spiritual guide and

disciple. Ruzbihan identifies Khidr's station as the station of unveiled discovery and contemplative witness (*maqam al-kashf wa 'l-mushahada*) and Moses' station as a station of moral cultivation and training (*maqam al-ta'dib*).<sup>20</sup> For al-Qashani, the treasure which Khidr protects is a metaphor for Khidr's gnosis which is only learned in the station of the heart (*maqam al-qalb*).<sup>21</sup> It is only in the station of the heart (*maqam al-qalb*) that one combines the apprehension of universals and particulars, and thus embodies and fulfills the work of a mediator. This insight is al-Qashani's philosophical gloss on the phenomena of Khidr's discerning insight into the events of Moses' life.<sup>22</sup> It is an insight surpassing Moses' knowledge. Ruzbihan, following leads in the hadith, clearly articulates that Moses and Khidr each have authority in a particular realm of knowledge.<sup>23</sup> While Moses manifests a superiority in knowing God's truth as eternal principles, Khidr surpasses him in discernment (*firasa* [*diakresis*]), or insight into the events of Moses' life.<sup>24</sup> In other words, Khidr's particular gift is the ability to read hearts and understand how to administer spiritual guidance or training through mentoring companionship (*suhba*).

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<sup>19</sup> 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhari, "Complaint of a Stranger Exiled from Home," trans. A.J. Arberry, in idem, *A Sufi Martyr: the Apologia of 'Ayn al-Qudat al-Hamadhari* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1969), 33.

<sup>20</sup> Ruzbihan Baqli, *'Ara'is al-bayan al-Haqa'iq al-Qur'an*, 593. For commentary on this passage, see chapter four, section IV.5.5.1.2.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Qashani, *Tafsir*, p. 771.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* For commentary on this passage, see chapter four, section XI.3.2.

<sup>23</sup> *Sahih Bukhari*, IV. 55. 23. 613.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 592 (ad. 18.66).

In describing these qualities of Khidr, Ruzbihan identifies Khidr as a “shaykh” knowing Moses’ condition.<sup>25</sup> But Ruzbihan also specifies that because Khidr is a saint (*wali*), “it is not [his] role to impart insight (*yatafarisu*) to a prophet.”<sup>26</sup> In addition to defining the mercy (*rahma*) with which Khidr has been imbued by God as “sainthood (*wilaya*), nearness, witnessing,”<sup>27</sup> Ruzbihan’s explicit designation of Khidr as a “saint” (*wali*) also encapsulates Khidr’s virtues of patience, his establishment in the station of unveiling and witnessing (*maqam al-kashf wa’l-mushahada*), and his discernment of Moses’ condition. All of these characteristics contribute to the value of the guidance and training he gives to Moses. In Ruzbihan’s view, Khidr, like a saint or shaykh can guide and train Moses, but not necessarily impart insight to him. This perspective also helps address the question of whether -- or how much -- Moses learned from Khidr in his journey. Here Ruzbihan attests the particularity of the situation between Khidr and Moses as one that is not merely a model for other apparently similar relationships. At the same time Ruzbihan uses the concepts of saint and shaykh to explain the dynamics of Khidr’s relationship to Moses. The analogies work in a hermeneutical circle: at one level the relationship between shaykh and murid explains the story of Khidr and Moses; at a second level, the story in turn explains the relationship between shaykh and murid.

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 592b (ad. 18.67a).

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 593 (ad. 18.67a).

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 591 (ad. 18.65b).

Al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan Baqli both emphasize right conduct (*adab*) and mentoring companionship (*suhba*) as keys to understanding and applying the story of Moses' journey with Khidr. Al-Qushayri assesses discipleship (*suhba*) as based on patience and obedience.<sup>28</sup> Obedience is demanded by a higher order of knowledge embodied in Khidr's acts. Khidr's knowledge is direct (*'ilm ladunni*), divinely inspired (*ilham*), and unveiled discovery (*kashf/mukashafa*). It is a knowledge of divine decree (*hukm*) outside the limits of exoteric knowledge (*'ilm*). And Moses' failure before Khidr is one of *shart al-'ilm*: it was the limits of Moses' knowledge, and his acts of imposing stipulations based on that limited knowledge that lead to Khidr's parting with Moses. As Ruzbihan expresses it, it is the "duty of discipleship" (*haqq al-mutabi'at*) to remain silent during the spiritual activity (*tasarruf*) of the teacher.

For the seeker to acquire direct knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) under the auspices of a teacher requires facing what I call the "paradox of mediation." The term "paradox of mediation" describes al-Qushayri's observation that Moses had asked to be taught something that had not initially been transmitted by a human teacher. Can direct or inner knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*) be taught? For al-Qushayri, Ruzbihan, and al-Qashani, Khidr's knowledge cannot be learned by instruction (*ta'lim*), but can only be imparted through mentoring companionship (*suhba*) and the proper conduct (*adab*) of that relationship. Khidr's training of Moses involves action (*tasarruf*) and silence, more than words and concepts. This simple observation that Khidr's pedagogy is one of

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 408 (ad. 18.69).

action and silence informs the interpretations of al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan. Moses acquires his knowledge by watching in silence and bearing with Khidr's intolerable actions. If there is a resolution of the paradox of mediation, it lies, according to al-Qushayri in following the agreement of patience and obedience which Khidr and Moses established. Al-Qushayri identifies in Moses' answer, "You will find me patient, God willing, and I will not disobey you in any affair," (18.69) three keys: (1) patience (*sabr*); (2) obedience (*la a 'siya*; "I will not disobey."); and (3) acknowledging the essential role of God's will (*in sha' Allah*) in expressing and fulfilling one's intention to follow.<sup>29</sup> As al-Qushayri concludes, Moses' insistence on explanation was incompatible with the need to wait for unveiled discovery (*kashf*). Since Moses' process of learning is like a journey (*safara al-ta'dib*, the journey of moral training), no description of the map can substitute for the actual traveling.<sup>30</sup>

Ruzbihan identifies this dichotomy between spiritual training and conceptual mediation or instruction when he critiques Moses' questioning as a sign of Moses' insufficiencies. Questions, says Ruzbihan are appropriate to instruction (*ta'lim*), but not to this training (*ta'dib*). This terminology echoes the distinction which had emerged by the 4<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century between two types of masters in Sufism: the teaching master

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<sup>29</sup> al-Qushayri, *ibid.*, 408 (ad. 18.69).

<sup>30</sup> In assessing Moses' journey with Khidr as a metaphor for teaching, it will be helpful to achieve a fuller and more realistic sense of the teaching act as indescribable. To do this I propose borrowing insights from Kenneth Burke's theory of rhetoric. Burke describes speech acts with a pentadic model whose elements, while symbolic, are non-verbal and focused on action: (1) the scene; (2) the act; (3) the agent; (4) the agency; (5) the purpose. This model identifies the essential non-verbal elements in the encounter between Khidr and Moses. See Kenneth Burke, *The Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), pp. xv-xxiii, et. al.

(*shaykh al-ta'lim*) and the spiritual director (*shaykh al-tarbiyya; shaykh al-ta'dib*) who is also known, even more appropriately as the teaching companion (*shaykh al-suhba*). Both al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan emphasize that by his act of questioning and by the content of his questions as well, Moses had imposed stipulations based on the limits of his knowledge (*shart al-'ilm/shurut al-'ilm*). Khidr's fluid process of mystical discovery (*mukashafa*) transcends these limits of the ordinary requirements of knowledge.<sup>31</sup> As al-Qushayri puts it, while Moses possessed knowledge (*'ilm*) Khidr knew wisdom's decree (*hukm*). The first suggests a relatively fixed form; the second a fluid process. This incongruity between Moses and Khidr necessitated the parting between them.

Al-Qashani devotes comparatively less attention to the master-disciple relationship. Khidr symbolizes the sacred intellect (*al-'aql al-qudsi*), the noetic faculty (*nous*) which directly apprehends universals, and receives prophecy. The spiritual companionship between Khidr and Moses serves as a metaphor for traveling the path to perfection and establishing a contented soul (*nafs al-mutma'inna*).<sup>32</sup> Al-Qashani exploits the narrative as an allegory of the soul. Al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan identified Khidr as the spiritual guide (*murshid*) and Moses as the aspirant (*murid*). Ruzbihan opened his discussion by examining the aspects of Moses' psyche: his heart (*qalb*), intellect (*'aql*), and soul (*nafs*) failed to grasp the wisdoms of the unseen (*hikam al-*

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<sup>31</sup> Al-Qushayri, *ibid.*, 410; Ruzbihan, *ibid.*, 593.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Qashani, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, p. 76.

*ghayb*) which are granted to the inner sense (*sirr*). Al-Qashani interprets Khidr, Moses, and the youth as symbols of an inner psychology. Khidr is the spirit (*ruh*); Moses, the heart (*qalb*) and soul (*nafs*); and the Moses' young servant symbolizes the soul (*nafs*) attached to the body (*jism*).<sup>33</sup>

In his allegorization, al-Qashani develops the story's motifs to outline the stages of the soul's development in spiritual training (*riyada*). Al-Qashani links the motifs of the story to three levels of the soul: the commanding soul (*nafs al-ammara*), the blaming soul (*nafs al-lawwama*), and the contented soul (*nafs al-mutma'inna*). The commanding soul (*nafs al-ammara*) is represented by the king seeking to overtake boats. The elimination of the commanding soul (*nafs al-ammara*) is symbolized by the killing of the youth. Moses' two excuses, "Don't blame me that I forgot..." (18.69) and "If I ask you anything," (18.76) represent his recognition of his sin and are utterances from his blaming soul (*al-nafs al-lawwama*). The rebuilding of the wall symbolizes the establishment of the contented soul (*al-nafs al-mutma'inna*) which replaces the authority of the commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammara*). Thus the goring of the hull of the boat and the slaying of the youth represent clearing out the inferior ego modes of the commanding soul (*al-nafs al-ammara*) and blaming soul (*al-nafs al-lawwama*) to allow the stronger wall-like soul of contentment (*al-nafs al-mutma'inna*) to be raised. The solidity of the wall represents quelling the stirrings in the soul and will. The motif of the wall "on the verge of destruction" points to the

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 766.

soul's weakness. For al-Qashani the wall and the companionship with Khidr represent the establishment of the soul of contentment (*al-nafs al-mutma'inna*).

Many other motifs receive al-Qashani's allegorizing, but this thread of interpretation, ascribing the story's events to the stations of the soul's development, is linked across al-Qashani's discussion. Further this allegory assumes, even though al-Qashani does not specify this, that the training which produces the establishment of the contented soul is conducted under the auspices of a guide or master. Al-Qashani does explicitly identify the thread of spiritual guidance in the story. In his exegesis of the verse, "If you would follow me...do not ask anything of me (18.70)," he describes spiritual training in terms of the master-disciple relationship as conducted through emulation (*iqtida'*), action, ethics, and efforts. These characteristics help distinguish this relationship of spiritual training (*tarbiyya*) from instruction (*ta'lim*).

Elsewhere we have reflected on the use of Moses as a measure of Muhammad's mission.<sup>34</sup> Moses' difficult prophetic career serves as a comparison in relation to Muhammad's challenges in developing the Islamic community (*umma*). Moses was challenged with personal shortcomings and circumstantial setbacks. Unlike Muhammad, he asked to be granted more than he could receive (asking God to show

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<sup>34</sup> Hugh Talat Halman, " "We Have Found Muhammad, a Prophet like Moses...": How the Hermeneutics of Genre Guide Comparisons between Muhammad and Moses in the Qur'an and *Sira*," (Master's Thesis, Duke University, 1993).



himself to him).<sup>35</sup> Where Moses' reach exceeds his grasp, Muhammad is described as the one whose "sight did not overreach."<sup>36</sup> Like Muhammad, Moses faced dissension from his community. The story of Moses' journey with Khidr extends some of this characterization of Moses. His encounter with Khidr then may be read as one of those moments of Moses' prophetic career which demonstrate his shortcomings. And the Prophet Muhammad's verdict on Moses' failings supports this view of Moses as an exemplar of shortcomings: "We would have wished that Moses had been patient; then Allah would have narrated more of their story."<sup>37</sup> The story of Moses' journey with Khidr then further shows Moses' rebelliousness, in this case against an exemplar of God, one commissioned to teach Moses and directly imbued with the essential qualities of wisdom (*'ilm ladunni*) and loving compassion (*rahma*) Moses in this instance models the breach of right conduct (*adab*). Moses' breach of proper conduct allows the Sufi commentators to use his counter-example to affirm the importance of *adab* in the practice and fulfillment of the teaching relationship.

The Sufi exegetes have found the richness of ambiguity of the Quranic passages which appear in the story of Moses' journey with Khidr to be fertile ground for developing a variety of perspectives. The ambiguities open what Alan Godlas has described as an "exegetical niche." Following the model of an "ecological niche," an

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<sup>35</sup> Qur'an Surat al-'A'raf (7. [143]).

<sup>36</sup> Qur'an Surat al-Najm (53.17).

<sup>37</sup> *Sahih Bukhari* I. 3. 124; VI .60. 249; VI. 60. 251. See also Muslim, *Al-Jami' us-Sahih* Chapter 992, sec. 5864, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqui (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1973).

uninhabited pocket filled with latent energy which can accommodate life, an “exegetical niche” is a semantic opening encouraging new exegesis to enter.<sup>38</sup> The story of Moses’ journey with Khidr is filled with the types of ambiguities and tensions which invite multiple readings. The story leaves open a number of questions (1) Did Moses succeed in learning Khidr’s level of true meaning (*ta’wil*)? Even the commentaries are silent on this point: they either assume or ignore the question of whether Khidr successfully taught, or whether Moses successfully learned, the true interpretation (*ta’wil*) which Khidr offers to impart. We know that Khidr announces he will tell Moses the true meaning (*ta’wil*), but does that mean that Moses grasped that true meaning? (2) To what extent does this story serve to inform an Islamic theodicy? Folklorists are prone to interpret the story as a theodicy tale, but what leads Muslim sources away from perceiving this story as a resource for discussing theodicy? Do the special roles of the protagonists (prophet and exceptional servant) outweigh the potential of this story to be adopted as a theodicy tale for ordinary mortals? One exception is al-Qushayri who presents three implicit theodicies: (1) the boat was destroyed to protect its wholeness (*salaam*) and for its preservation (*baqa*’); (2) the exchange of the slain child with one more pure and compassionate brings happiness (*sa’ada*) to the parents; and (3) fixing the wall protected the treasure and made it permanent (*istibqa*’) to allow its later retrieval (*tafrid*). These interpretations are implicitly theodicies; however, al-Qushayri

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<sup>38</sup> Alan Godlas, “The Metaphysical Qur’anic Hermeneutic and Esoteric Epistemology of Ruzbihan al-Baqli,” Conference Paper, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Nashville, Tennessee, November 18, 2000.

neither emphasizes these exegetical implications, nor identifies the type of interpretation he is making. In fact, al-Qushayri explicitly frames these comments as examples of Khidr's desire to leave in Moses' heart no trace of objection.

One of the primary distinctions underlying the Sufi commentators' interpretation is that of the difference between moral training (*ta'dib*) and instruction (*ta'lim*). Al-Qushayri and Ruzbihan both emphasized that Moses' mistake in asking questions was in part his misunderstanding that Khidr's teaching was not instruction (for which asking questions would have been appropriate), but rather, moral training (*ta'dib*) which must be conveyed beyond verbal discourse and effort. As al-Qushayri stipulated, three factors help to resolve the "paradox of mediation," the dilemma of human transmission of what was received as a gift. These factors are patience, obedience, and seeking God's will. But these are pre-conditions and not causes: the knowledge is beyond discursive inquiry or human effort. In this sense mentoring companionship (*suhba*) describes the ambiguous and subtle quality of this endeavor.

These points are implicit in the hagiographical accounts. In this literature, Khidr models, encourages, and endorses the mentoring relationship. Typically he summons those to whom he appears to pursue their relationship with their pre-existing living shaykh. He engages not so much in verbal instruction, but in companionship and mentoring which reinvigorate an aspirant's own path and relationship with his shaykh. Khidr also serves to enhance the authority of mortal

masters. Where questions of authority and transmission need resolution, Khidr provides a *deus ex machina*, providing new authority or direct transmission from God or the Prophet Muhammad. Often Khidr provides a necessary lesson, intervention, or training in the spiritual development of a master or disciple. Khidr thus becomes in Sufi hagiography a trope of authority, authorization, and direct transmission.

Both Ruzbihan and al-Qashani identified Moses with the heart. In the station of the heart (*maqam al-qalb*), those who persevere unearth the treasure of gnosis. But why would Moses make a suitable personification of the qualities of the heart? It was Moses who yearned and strove for the place “where two seas meet.” It was Moses’ heartfelt desire (*irada*) which made him a fitting disciple (*murid*), even as it was his impatience which disqualified him and induced Khidr to part ways with him. In returning to the place where Moses lost his fish, he found a mentor who challenged both his hunger for justice and his alleged certainty. Limited to the perspectives of his heart and the stipulations of knowledge (*shurut al-‘ilm*), Moses could not perceive the true meaning (*ta’wil*) of events before him.

Without guidance, Moses could not produce a “hermeneutic of origins.” Such a hermeneutic calls for seeing the source of origin, the stages of unfoldment, and the resolution of actions and their consequences. The “hermeneutics of origins” appears not as a conceptual procedure, but as a state of being generated in part by patience

(*sabr*) and obedience. Moses' inability to endure his teacher Khidr's actions with patience (*sabr*) interfered with his training (*ta'dib*) under Khidr.

We began this dissertation with a story by Ibn 'Arabi of a visit from Khidr. When Khidr appeared to Ibn 'Arabi walking on the water, he "talked...in his own language." The role of extra-linguistic factors in the "hermeneutics of origins" suggest why Khidr's language is distinctive. It is as al-Qashani said the "language of spiritual states." The "hermeneutics of origins" (*ta'wil*) requires a vital and existential engagement with which the exegete returns with his whole being to "retrace his or her steps" to a living source of knowledge. In this sense Joseph's interpretations of dreams, Khidr's mentoring companionship (*suhba*), and the disciple's engagement with his or her guide (*murshid*), are related as knowledge expressed in the "language of spiritual states," i.e., "in his [Khidr's] own language."

By "retracing the steps" which Moses took, Sufi commentators found their own inner meanings, their own 'lost fish,' and 'hidden treasure.' The story of Moses' journey with Khidr allowed the Sufi commentators to explore the subtle and sensitive questions of the role of mediators in Islamic spirituality. The Sufi commentators recognized in the story of Moses' journey with Khidr the place "where two seas meet:" Khidr's 'sea' of knowledge, beyond, but adjacent to, Moses' sea of revelation together describe the outer (*zahir/shari'a*) and inner (*batin/tariqa*) aspects of the spiritual life. As al-Qashani asserted, only in the station of the heart (*maqam al-qalb*)

is gnosis acquired. Only in the “station of the heart” does one apprehend both the universal forms and the particular entities. The heart is the place “where two seas meet.”

Seen collectively, al-Qushayri, Ruzbihan, and al-Qashani privilege the “inner” (*batin*) readings of allegory and metaphor over “literal” or “obvious” (*zahir*) meanings. It is not that they do not incorporate the literal dimension. Al-Qashani in particular includes many explicit details that do not seem to contribute to allegorizing. But the main focus of the exegesis is on the soul’s work of spiritual development. This represents a defining characteristic of Sufi tafsirs distinct from the methodology of commentaries based on received traditions (*tafsir bi'l-ma'thur*) exemplified by al-Tabari’s *Jami ‘ al-bayan ‘an ta’wil ay al-Qur’an*. This “hermeneutics of *batin*,” a metaphorical and allegorical reading is meant to bring the meaning into one’s actions, thoughts, and motives. It is a “hermeneutics of origins” (*ta’wil*) in that it summons the reader to trace his or her steps back to a point of inwardness and origin -- the heart.

The Quranic story of Khidr and Moses already suggests what Sufis assert: a subtle level of meaning lies buried like a treasure of inheritance beneath the level of explicit prophetic knowledge. Adopting and adapting the rich symbolic resources of this narrative of Moses’ journey with Khidr, the Sufi commentaries provide a map --or at least some of the landmarks -- on the journey of mentoring companionship or spiritual guidance (*suhba*). By applying the lessons of this story one might then enter

into the paradox of mediation, learn what eludes instruction, and so “take the Qur’an to heart.” In this sense Rumi’s mentor, Shams-i Tabrizi took the story of Moses’ journey with Khidr to heart:

Blessed is the one who finds such a ‘servant [from our servants]’ and who holds the story of Moses and Khidr in his heart, and makes it his Imam.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Shams- i Tabrizi, *Maqalat*. Edited by Muhammad ‘Ali Muwahhid. (Tehran: Intisharat-i Khawarazmi, 1990), p. 212-213. Unpublished translation by Omid Safi. I am grateful to Professor Safi for sharing his work with me.

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